

GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR:
A THEOLOGY OF PREACHING TO THE RICH

A THESIS-PROJECT
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PREACHING TO CULTURE AND CULTURES

BY
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To Nancy:

For whom I preach the gospel and from whom I have come to truly understand it.

Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

— D.T. Niles

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PREFACE

I was standing on the water's edge on Martha's Vineyard, looking westward toward an orange and pink sunset stretching across the sky above the Long Island Sound. It was my first time on the small vacation island located a few nautical miles off the coast of Massachusetts. I was there with some colleagues who belonged to a Christian organization called FOCUS, which ministers specifically to families whose children attend private schools along the East Coast. They had recently hired me to run their New York City chapter, and we had gathered for a staff meeting at FOCUS's picturesque 40-acre property on the island. As I stood on that beach, small waves gently swirling around my ankles, I was trying to wrap my mind around my new calling. Everything I had known about being a minister was being turned upside-down. I had always thought of ministry as a means of helping helpless people. Disenfranchised people. Poor people. Every mission trip I had participated in was designed to serve those who were financially poorer than I was. I had grown up in the middle class, in the Midwest, in the middle of a Christian community. When I considered my calling to be a pastor, I always imagined it would be like a lifelong mission trip in which I would bring my privilege and resources to those who have neither.

Standing on that scenic beach, I wondered if I was in the wrong place. The shoreline of Martha's Vineyard is lined with multimillion-dollar vacation homes belonging to people who are much, much wealthier than I was. As I stood there, I received help in understanding my predicament from the man standing next to me. David was one of my new colleagues at FOCUS, and he worked as an evangelist

amongst students attending prestigious boarding schools in New England, organizing on-campus Bible studies for teenagers who drive Maserati sports cars or have trust funds bigger than my parents' net worth. I looked at David, his face reflecting the radiant colors of the sunset above us, and expressed to him that I was feeling conflicted. I said something like, "How can I bring the gospel, which Jesus said is 'good news to the poor,' to these people?" David's answer to my question would become the genesis of this thesis-project. He turned to me and said, "Jesus said he was good news to the poor. But how do you know he meant only the financially poor? As a minister of the gospel, your job is to arrive in your mission field—whatever that place may be—and try to figure out what the specific poverty there is." Then, gesturing toward the luxurious houses along the shoreline, he said, "These people aren't financially poor, but they have other forms of poverty. Try to find out what those are, and bring the good news to them."

After saying this, David casually walked more deeply into the waves, dived into the water, and swam away. I stood there; beholding the sunset and beginning a journey that would help me understand the unique mission field in which God had placed me. That was ten years ago, and I continue my journey with this project.

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To Chuck Davis for nudging me to pursue this Doctorate of Ministry, and for modeling bold gospel proclamation and leadership.

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To the congregation at Stanwich Church for supporting me, for engaging with the material in meaningful ways, and for giving me Spirit-guided and honest feedback.

To my parents who saw the ember of my calling early and helped fan it into flame.

To Riley and Evangeline for teaching me about faith every day.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis-project is to help preachers understand how to communicate the gospel—defined by Jesus as “good news to the poor”—to people who are materially wealthy. It examines others’ work on this subject, original research, and Biblical texts. Biblical concepts are placed into conversation with contemporary wealthy Christians using a broad survey, a group participation class, and two in-depth interviews: one with a materially wealthy man and one with a materially poor woman. The thesis-project concludes with a theological framework for preachers in materially wealthy contexts to help them understand their message as gospel communicators.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

The opening supposition in this project is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for people who can perceive their own poverty, whether that poverty is measured in spiritual/relational, material/financial terms, or both. Effective gospel preaching helps expose the various kinds of poverty in the hearers' lives and reveals the Savior who brings good news to each kind. This supposition is rooted in the words and actions of Jesus, who, in his first public sermon, cited Isaiah 61:1, in which the prophet Isaiah declared, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to *proclaim good news to the poor*."¹ Jesus' accompanying sermon on this text, which he preached in his hometown of Nazareth, is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. His message was short but poignant. He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."² Thus, as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus declared himself as the One who is "good news to the poor." That's not all. He also said, "[The Spirit] has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."³

¹ Isaiah 61:1, emphasis mine. All Scriptural citations are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

² Luke 4:21.

³ Luke 4:18b-19.

Jesus' reference to "the year of the Lord's favor" is a reference to the Year of Jubilee, prescribed in Scripture to occur once every forty-nine years.⁴ It was intended to reset land ownership and therefore provide forgiveness of financial debt between persons in the nation of Israel. According to Timothy Keller, we can consider this a *redistribution* (although the term is now politically loaded) of land and wealth in the God-governed society of ancient Israel.⁵

Jesus therefore associated himself as the bringer of good news to the poor and the proclamation of the Year of Jubilee in which wealth was redistributed to the poor. How, then, can the message of Jesus be good news to the rich?

Question

This project aims answer that question by finding a better way to preach what Jesus called "good news to the poor" to people who are materially and financially wealthy. Preaching can easily fall on one of two sides of the issue of money. Either it can encourage hearers to seek financial prosperity without regard to the poor, or, it can imply that rich people should give up all their wealth for Jesus' sake. This project attempts to find a third, more nuanced way of understanding wealth that goes beyond accommodating the rich, on the one hand, or condemning them, on the other. The New Testament generally communicates God's unconditional love for all people before it admonishes them towards changed behavior. At the same time, the Scriptures do not turn a blind eye to money-related matters that have the potential to lead

⁴ Leviticus 25:1-55.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2010), 28.

people into spiritual pitfalls. Since the Bible is nuanced on this topic, preaching should be as well.

The basic question I am seeking to answer is:

- **If Jesus was motivated by the Spirit to proclaim good news (the gospel) to the poor,**
- **And if preachers now are called to do the same,**
- **Then how can preachers proclaim the gospel to people who are materially and financially wealthy?**

Parameters

For the purpose of clarification, this project does *not* seek primarily to answer the following questions:

- Should wealthy Christians be fighting for economic justice in our world? (This topic is addressed herein but is not the main focus of the project.)
- Does material wealth impede spiritual growth?
- What are the systemic causes of material poverty, and what is the Church's role in addressing them?

These are worthy questions and have been explored by many other scholars and authors. This thesis-project focuses mainly on the element of gospel preaching to the wealthy, seeking to understand wealthy people as listeners and as spiritual beings, before inviting them to respond to the gospel with action. It touches on the moral implications of the gospel, but those implications are not the gospel itself. The main thrust of this project is gospel preaching, not law preaching. As such, the project views the financially wealthy as potentially spiritually or relationally impoverished people who can hear the “good news to the poor” and believe that they can be counted among those for whom the news is intended.

Defining the Terms

In any dialog or analytical argument, it is important to operate with clearly defined terms. The phrase “proclaim good news to the poor” is centrally important to this thesis-project. Isaiah wrote it. Jesus repeated it. There are three terms within it that need to be defined: “proclaim,” “good news,” and “the poor.”

What Is Meant by the Term “Proclaim”?

Jesus said that he had been anointed to *proclaim* good news to the poor. For this word, Luke’s Gospel uses the Greek term *kerysso*, which is used sixty-one times in the Bible.⁶ It is translated in other places as “to herald”⁷ and “to preach.”⁸ Though it was a very short sermon, Jesus used his proclamation to reveal himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. He heralded, he proclaimed, he preached to those gathered in Nazareth, as the Holy Spirit anointed him. In other words, Jesus’ activity in Nazareth was not a counseling session, it was not a tweet or a blog post, and it was not merely a public reading of Scripture. Jesus preached.

According to Jesus, he preached the good news because the Spirit anointed him to do so. Later in his ministry, Jesus told his followers that the Holy Spirit would similarly come upon them, anointing them to be his witnesses in the world.⁹ Thus, followers of Jesus are called to testify to him and the good news he brought. Jesus’

⁶ Walter L. Liefeld, *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

⁷ For example, 2 Peter 2:5.

⁸ For example, the King James Version translators had Jesus saying in Luke 4 that he was anointed to *preach* good news to the poor.

⁹ Acts 1:8.

first sermon in Luke, and his later command to bear witness to him, began a global chain reaction of gospel preaching. A few years later, the Apostle Paul admonished the young preacher Timothy to “preach the word, [being] ready in season and out of season.”¹⁰ The chain reaction of gospel preaching continues to this day. In fact, the best gospel preaching today is much like Jesus’ first sermon, which was a message that would fit nicely within Haddon Robinson’s timeless definition of expository preaching: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”¹¹

Even now, gospel communicators bear witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thomas G. Long describes gospel preachers as witnesses. A witness is someone who has seen something and is asked to say something about what he or she saw. Long writes, “‘Witness’ in the first sense means to *perceive*; in the second sense it means to *testify*.”¹² When Jesus preached, the Scriptures stood as witness to him. When mortal preachers preach, we become witnesses to Jesus as we have encountered him in the Scriptures.

In Paul’s epistle to the Romans, he clearly indicated the tremendous value that preaching has in the advancement of the gospel:

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 4:2.

¹¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 20.

¹² Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1989), 78.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.¹³

This project focuses on the preaching and hearing of the word of Christ which produces faith, even in the hearts of people who are not materially or financially poor. It does not focus on ministries or programs for the spiritual development of the rich or strategies to address financial injustice; it focuses specifically on *preaching* the good news of Jesus Christ to people who are materially and financially wealthy.

What Is Meant By the Term “Good News”?

The Greek word *euangelion* is used fifty-four times in the Bible and often translated as “good news” in English. It is also translated as “gospel” and “glad tidings.” For example, at the birth of Jesus, when the angel proclaimed “good news of great joy” to the shepherds, Luke records him using the word *euangelion*.¹⁴ It is the same word from which we derive the phrase “evangelism.” When people are evangelistic, they are people who spread the good news. In this thesis-project, when the term “gospel” is used in reference to preaching, it means the proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ.

¹³ Romans 10:14-17.

¹⁴ Luke 2:10.

“It’s Good News, Not Good Advice.”

When considering how to preach to people who are materially wealthy, a preacher might have a desire to give advice or even to condemn people for their lifestyles. A preacher might think, How can I get these rich people to change their behaviors? But this type of messaging is inherently not gospel messaging. If all theology fits into one of two categories, Law and Gospel,¹⁵ then preaching that aims solely to change behavior would be considered Law preaching. This kind of preaching is good advice rather than good news.

It is difficult to determine who first used the phrase “the gospel is good news, not good advice.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones is often given attribution for coining it, but others have adopted the phrase as their own, including Timothy Keller. In his book *Center Church*, Keller wrote: “The gospel is good news, not good advice. The gospel is not primarily a way of life. It is not something we do, but something that has been done for us and something that we must respond to.”¹⁶

Gospel proclamation prompts an action response, but it is not firstly or exclusively a command toward action. It is not a list of behavior modifications such as “love your neighbor” or “sell all your possessions and give to the poor.” Rather, the gospel is a proclamation that something happened in history that impacts us all. What is the “something”? It is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of God’s own son. This is “good news to the poor” because, in

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia House, 1955), 162.

¹⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 29.

Christ, God has been generous to us; he has lavished his great love upon us.¹⁷ God so loved the world that he *gave*. The Bible describes us all as the needy recipients of God's generosity. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."¹⁸ According to this verse, Jesus emptied himself (he chose to become poor) so that we could become rich. This is the gift of his grace.

Responding to the Good News

In order to receive such a gift from Jesus, one would have to acknowledge his or her poverty and receive God's generosity. Such generosity prompts a response from the receiver, but the gift itself is not a command to respond. News about the gift is different from instructions on how to apply it to your life. Imagine you have just received word that your wealthy uncle has died and has left \$10,000,000 to you in his will. The person who delivers this news to you is the bringer of good news! Upon hearing it, you might respond in certain ways. You might dance and shout exclamations of joy or gratitude. After your immediate response, you will probably begin to plan how you will spend the money, considering which of your debts to pay and which of your favorite charities to bless. But none of these responses were contained within the news itself. The news itself merely communicated a matter of fact: You have inherited enormous wealth. Your response is a natural outcome of what you

¹⁷ 1 John 3:1 (NIV).

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

have heard. In the same way, gospel preaching is primarily good news. It prompts a response, which sometimes the preacher outlines for the congregation and other times happens organically in the hearts and lives of the hearers.

As has been previously stated, the hope of this thesis-project is to help preachers better understand gospel preaching to the materially wealthy. With a gospel perspective, preachers can help congregations understand their own measurements of poverty so that they can be in a posture to receive the generosity of God's gift that is communicated in the word.

What Is Meant By the Term "The Poor"?

Herein lies the definitional issue this project addresses. How do we define the term "the poor"? If we consider Jesus' definition of "the poor" in Luke 4, and think only in terms of material and financial poverty, we would conclude that the gospel is primarily "good" only to financially impoverished people. We would consider Jesus' self-declared association with the Year of Jubilee as an association with literal land and money redistribution—largely benefiting the materially poor while impeding the materially wealthy, who ostensibly would lose some of the land they had amassed over the preceding 48 years. However, if Jesus was speaking only in terms of material wealth and poverty, it would cause a serious problem for anyone trying to preach the gospel to people who are materially wealthy. The basic and primary message of gospel preaching would be simple: wealthy people should give their materials and finances to the poor. But is this all that Jesus meant?

When we look at the rest of what Jesus quoted from Isaiah, we see that he also associated himself with freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed. We may find it easier to realize that when he referred to freedom for prisoners, he may have been speaking not only of people who are literally behind bars, but also of those imprisoned by fear, sin, or condemnation. For example, the Apostle Paul urged the Galatians, “Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,”¹⁹ when he was describing their tendency to follow the law in an obligatory way. Paul seems to have used the term “slavery” here not to describe literal enslavement, but to point to a spiritual condition. Similarly, when Jesus referred to recovery of sight to the blind, we may find it easier to realize that he also included those people who lack the eyes of faith. For example, in John 9, there is a story of Jesus healing a physically blind man. Some Pharisees challenged Jesus because he healed the man on the Sabbath. At the end of the chapter, John records a dialog between Jesus and the Pharisees, in which the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Are we also blind?” Jesus tells them, “I came into this world, that those who do not see may see.”²⁰ From this exchange we can infer that Jesus did not intend only to heal physical blindness, but spiritual blindness as well. Regarding the claim that he offered release for those who are oppressed, we know from Paul’s letters that oppression comes in many forms. For example, in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, “We are afflicted *in*

¹⁹ Galatians 5:1.

²⁰ John 9:39.

every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”²¹

From these examples, we see that Jesus (and Paul) sometimes described blindness, imprisonment, and oppression as metaphors for deeper spiritual conditions. In the same way, we can deduce that Jesus’ words in Luke 4 may refer to “the poor” not exclusively as the materially and financially poor, but also as the spiritually and relationally poor. If he only meant the former, then our understanding of the gospel would be limited to being good news only to those who have little money or possessions. Jesus’ gospel would be irrelevant for the rich.

Another way of understanding the problem is to ask the question, If Jesus is good news to the poor, is he then *bad news* to the rich? A preacher could answer this in several different ways. On the one hand, a preacher could insist that God desires his people to prosper financially. The preacher could use Biblical texts such as Jeremiah 29:11 to communicate God’s desire for his people to become rich: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to *prosper* you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”²² On the other hand, a preacher could use texts such as Luke 6:24 (and many others) as warnings against financial prosperity: “But *woe to you who are rich*,” Jesus said, “for you have received your consolation.”²³ Does God want us to be rich, or does God favor the poor? It is difficult at first to imagine that both could be true.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, emphasis mine.

²² Jeremiah 29:11, NIV, emphasis mine.

²³ Luke 6:24, emphasis mine.

Ronald J. Sider, in his book *Rich Christians In Age of Hunger*, explores the question, “Is God on the side of the poor?” He writes,

God . . . is not neutral. His freedom from bias does not mean that he maintains neutrality in the struggle for justice. The Bible clearly and repeatedly says that God is at work in history exalting the poor and casting down the rich who got that way by oppressing or neglecting the poor. In that sense, God is on the side of the poor. He has a special concern for them because of their vulnerability.²⁴

In many cases (such as the above), preachers define wealth and poverty primarily in financial and material terms. But a closer look throughout the Bible reveals a different kind of poverty: spiritual/relational poverty.

Can rich people be spiritually or relationally impoverished?

In 2006 I was called to lead a Christian organization serving independent school students and their families living on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Having grown up in West Michigan, I hadn’t heard of the Upper East Side until I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. As a seminarian, I took an internship with a man who was the chaplain for the New York Yankees and also had a ministry to Wall Street men. In my internship, I conducted boardroom Bible studies with men in the Financial District. In 2006, when I began running an organization for independent school students, I learned more about the families of those men in the boardrooms. When I first came to the Upper East Side, I would walk along Park Avenue, which is home to some of the wealthiest people in the world. I saw their fine clothes, the children raised by expensive nannies, and the big, black cars. Basically, I

²⁴ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 62.

saw rich people. But the longer I worked with the families who live on Park Avenue, and the more I became embedded in their lives, the more I began to see beyond their expensive trappings. I learned about their personal struggles, loneliness, fears, and brokenness. When I first arrived on the Upper East Side, I saw their wealth. After living amongst them for a few years, I saw their poverty.

In *Walking With the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Bryant Myers has written a thorough guide for understanding poverty in all of its known forms. After outlining many causes and types of poverty, Myers concludes that “the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational,” and, “the nature of poverty is fundamentally spiritual.”²⁵ Relational and spiritual causes of poverty can impact anyone, regardless of material or financial levels of wealth. Myers explores the idea that even those who are financially wealthy—he calls them the “non-poor”—can be considered impoverished: “The non-poor have a great deal in common with the poor from the biblical perspective... The non-poor suffer from the same kind of poverty as the poor. They too suffer from marred identity, but with a marring of a different kind.”²⁶

We will explore this idea from Myers in more detail in *Chapter Three*, and we will seek to understand the related Biblical concepts in more depth in *Chapter Two*. These chapters explore the broader definitions of poverty and review some of Jesus’ varied responses to them. For example, they show, on the one hand, that Jesus instructed some rich people to be more generous and even to become poor, and on the

²⁵ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 142-3.

²⁶ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 145-6.

other hand he also loved some rich people without condition and without commanding them. These Biblical narratives are important for understanding the full breadth of the gospel and how to preach it to the rich.

Overview

The primary question of the thesis-project is:

- **If Jesus was motivated by the Spirit to proclaim good news (the gospel) to the poor,**
- **And if preachers now are called to do the same,**
- **Then how can preachers proclaim the gospel to people who are materially and financially wealthy?**

Seeking to answer this question, the project is designed in the following manner:

Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations explores selected Biblical passages such as the Rich Young Ruler, the Sermon on the Mount, the story of Zacchaeus, and Psalm 73, among others. In the story of the Rich Young Ruler, we see Jesus telling a wealthy person to sell all of his possessions and give to the poor. This well-known story requires some close examination if we are to understand what it means for the gospel to be preached to the materially wealthy. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls the poor blessed. What are the implications of this statement in the context of preaching to the rich? Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is a clear example of how Jesus interacted with a person who was financially rich but relationally impoverished. In Psalm 73, we encounter a man who has his views of materially wealthy people radically changed simply by entering the sanctuary of God. The writer of the psalm, Asaph, exposes his own heart as he describes his envy of the materially wealthy before describing his re-discovery of what—or who—is his most pre-

cious treasure. With the psalm, we can establish a theological foundation for preachers and their own view of the wealthy, as well as an exploration of what happens in everyone's hearts when they enter the sanctuary to worship God and hear the good news.

Chapter Three: Literature Review is an evaluation of several authors' works on Christianity and its relationship with wealth, how theologians tend to think about rich people, and how some authors amplify the impulse to motivate rich people to be more generous or become poor.

Chapter Four: Project Design reveals the findings of three research projects. The results of the survey compare the various responders' answers and draw some conclusions about what those answers can reveal about the gospel and its relationship with material wealth. The survey was designed to discover how people feel about their wealth, both material and spiritual. The group class reveals statements and reflections made as they studied Bible passages that touch on relevant themes. The chapter also describes anecdotal reports from the in-depth interviews of a wealthy man and a poor woman.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Outcomes amalgamates the Biblical foundations of *Chapter Two*, the literature review of *Chapter Three*, and the findings from the research in *Chapter Four*. The chapter provides a theological framework for preachers who have been called to preach to rich congregations.

Methodology

Using the congregation of Stanwich Church as a source for relevant anecdotal information, this project includes three research methodologies:

- A two-week class entitled “Good News to the Poor,” in which around 35 adult participants engaged with several Biblical passages and described how they perceived the theology within them.
- A broad survey of 125 participants asking questions related to material wealth, the gospel, and spiritual poverty.
- In-depth interviews with one multimillionaire man and one materially poor woman. The interviewees interact with key Biblical texts as well as other related theological ideas.

The conclusions of these research projects are included in *Chapter Four: Project Design*.

Setting

The congregational and cultural setting in which this thesis-project was conducted is Stanwich Congregational Church in Greenwich, CT. Greenwich is a town of around 62,000 residents²⁷ in Fairfield County in the southwest corner of the state of Connecticut, on the edge of metropolitan New York City. The town is connected to Midtown Manhattan by a commuter train, allowing residents to live in Greenwich and work in the Financial District, otherwise known as Wall Street, in New York

²⁷ "Quickfacts: Greenwich Town, Fairfield County, Connecticut. Population Estimates, July 1, 2014 (V2014)," United States Census Bureau, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/0900133620,0933690>.

City. MONEY Magazine cites Greenwich as the second highest on its list of “Top Earning Towns” in the United States.²⁸ Eight known billionaires live in Greenwich,²⁹ although we will see in the in-depth interview with a wealthy resident that there are likely many more.³⁰ Less than 5 percent of the population in Greenwich lives below the poverty line.³¹ The U.S. Census Bureau cites the median home value estimate in Greenwich as “\$1,000,000 or higher,”³² and in Fairfield County there are over 29,000 “millionaire households.”³³ With this high concentration of financial wealth, the community of Greenwich sustains several country clubs and yacht clubs, as well as ten private schools with tuition as high as \$41,000 per student per year.³⁴

Greenwich residents exercise the power of their wealth in several ways, including by donating generously to political candidates: over the past ten years, residents in the church’s zip code alone (06831) have contributed over \$57,000,000 to politicians.³⁵ The median household income in the church’s zip code is \$280,281.³⁶

²⁸ “Best Place to Live 2014, Top Earning Towns,” *MONEY Magazine*, September 19, 2014, accessed May 12, 2016, <http://time.com/money/3318911/top-earning-towns-best-places/>.

²⁹ “Forbes 2016 World’s Billionaires: Meet the Richest People on the Planet,” *Forbes*, March 1, 2016, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/luisakroll/2016/03/01/forbes-2016-worlds-billionaires-meet-the-richest-people-on-the-planet/#6357055e41cb>.

³⁰ Appendix B.

³¹ “Quickfacts.”

³² “Quickfacts.”

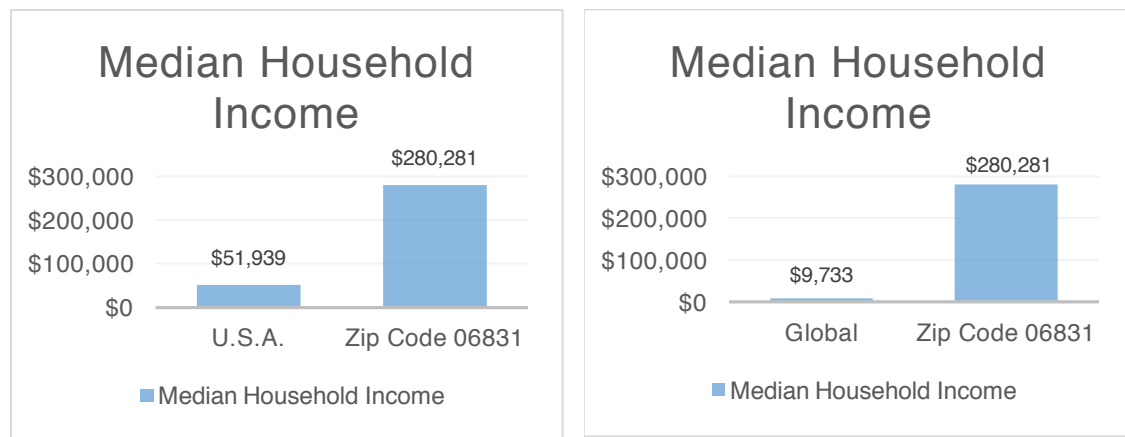
³³ “Where Millionaires Live in America,” *Kiplinger*, June 2014, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/real-estate/T010-S001-where-millionaires-live-in-america-slide-show/index.html#Bm82EF5ffgm80DBG.99>.

³⁴ “Tuition and Financial Aid,” *Greenwich Academy*, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.greenwichacademy.org/page.cfm?p=520>.

³⁵ “Greenwich, Ct 06831 Campaign Contributions,” *CampaignMoney.com*, accessed May 23, 2016, http://www.campaignmoney.com/political/contributions/connecticut_greenwich_06831.asp?cycle=16&mode=s.

To put that in context, the United States' national median household income is \$51,939³⁷, and the global median household income is \$9,733.³⁸ Households in the church's zip code are 540 percent more financially wealthy than the median U.S. household, and 2,800 percent more financially wealthy than the median household of all countries on Earth.

Figures 1 and 2: U.S.A. and Global Median Household Income



Financial wealth is a relative concept. A person living in the top 1 percent in one country may not even be in the top 50 percent of another country. For the sake of this project, the comparative data exhibited in the charts above suggests that the socioeconomic culture surrounding Stanwich Church is materially and financially wealthy.

³⁶ "06831 Income Statistics," Income By Zip Code, accessed June 10, 2016. <https://www.incomebyzipcode.com/connecticut/06831>.

³⁷ "Real Median Household Income in the U.S.," Economic Research, accessed June 10, 2016. <https://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/MEHOINUSA672N>.

³⁸ "Worldwide, Median Household About \$10,000," Gallup, accessed June 10, 2016. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166211/worldwide-median-household-income-000.aspx>.

A Brief History and Current State of Stanwich Church

Local farmers formed Stanwich Church in 1731.³⁹ The founders were farmers, but over the centuries, the material wealth of the surrounding neighborhood has increased. In 2006, the congregation completed a new \$18.5 million property acquisition and church building project, built in the same New England white steeple architecture of the congregation's historical sanctuaries. It is a picturesque structure, positioned on the land precisely to enjoy the Sunday morning sunshine, which pours in through tall sanctuary windows.

In 2014, the church launched a second campus in neighboring Stamford, CT, which averages around 75 people each Sunday. Today, around 550 people worship at Stanwich in three unique worship services, including the Stamford campus.

In the cultural context of financial and material wealth, the pastors and ministry leaders of Stanwich Church deliver gospel proclamation through expository preaching, Christian education, fifteen weekly small group Bible studies around town, and more. We have robust Children's and Youth Ministries, and an active Missions Committee that equips and sends the congregants into missions and missional living. Stanwich Church is located in a predominantly wealthy area, and it is thriving in its gospel mission.

It would be easy to drive through the church's neighborhood, see the big houses and expensive trappings, and only see material wealth. But in returning to the main question for this project, one must ask: If gospel preaching is "good news to the

³⁹ The historical facts about Stanwich Church in this chapter are culled from internal church documents and a self-published book by congregant Don Osgood entitled *A Light in the Back Country*.

poor,” as declared by Jesus, then how can the gospel be communicated in a neighborhood like the one surrounding Stanwich Church?

To begin answering this question, let us examine the word of God. We will begin doing so in *Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations*.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Is the Gospel *Bad News* for the Rich?

In the middle of the twentieth century, H. Richard Niebuhr said that every generation of Christians must face, in one form or another, the challenge of reconciling “God and mammon.”¹ A century before Niebuhr, Pope Leo XIII published an encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum*—“Of Things New”—which was an attempt to deal theologically with “the great revolutions in democracy and science” that were leading to the proliferation of new forms of wealth across the globe.² John Schneider, in *The Good of Affluence*, describes the Twentieth Century as a time when many people were experiencing unprecedented material wealth while many others were still living in poverty as they witnessed friends or public figures rise to wealth. For some of them, Schneider says, it became easy to despise the rich.³

Now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the Occupy Wall Street movement persists as a similar cultural phenomenon, yet apparently without the theological underpinning of previous centuries. Protesters gather in parks, march in streets, and post messages on social media. People who identify as “the 99 percent” protest “the 1 percent” and the economic system that seems rigged in favor of those

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

² John R. Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 13.

³ Schneider, *The Good of Affluence*, 13ff.

who are richest of all. While the response to such protests from those in power has often been derisive and dismissive,⁴ some of the movement's assertions can be validated by statistics. In October 2011, *The Economist* published an article examining the claims of Occupy Wall Street. Citing a report from the Congressional Budget Office, they concluded, "a system that works well for the very richest has delivered returns on labor that are disappointing for everyone else."⁵

Those who can't seem to rise financially, aware of those who seem happily perched on top of the heap, feel an understandable frustration. When the system seems unfair, it is easy to despise the very rich.

The phenomenon precedes these recent centuries of human history. During the Old and New Testament periods, people grappled with issues of wealth, poverty, and justice.⁶ As we have already seen in the case of Ronald Sider, some scholars even point to a Biblical narrative in which God seems to side *with* the poor and *against* the rich.⁷ Indeed, we can find a common thread throughout the Bible about how God is particularly interested in materially wealthy people sharing their resources with the poor, bringing justice to the oppressed, and providing shelter for the

⁴ Alex Hern, "Occupy Founder Calls on Obama to Appoint Eric Schmidt 'Ceo of America'," accessed July 28, 2016, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/mar/20/occupy-founder-obama-eric-schmidt-ceo-america>.

⁵ "The 99 Percent," *The Economist*, October 26, 2011, accessed July 5, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/10/income-inequality-america?page=1Income>.

⁶ For example, in the Old Testament, these issues appear frequently in the Torah and the Prophets. In the New Testament, as we will see in the remainder of this project, they become a major theme of the message of Jesus in the Gospels.

⁷ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 1997), 62.

vulnerable. Isaiah 58 is a poignant example. After exonerating his hearers for their half-hearted fasting and false piety, God spoke through Isaiah to say,

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?⁸

Isaiah's words communicate God's distaste for when people participate in empty religious practices such as simply refraining from eating bread in order to display dutiful piety. Isaiah shows how God is instead interested in people sharing that bread with the hungry. He goes further to say that people should not just pour out their resources to those in need, they should also pour out their lives for them. This kind of sacrificial love is what God calls his people to show to those in need. He calls this justice.

God's anger is kindled when he sees injustice. What is injustice, according to the Bible? One common Biblical definition is when wealthy people treat their employees unfairly:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice,
who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing
and does not give him his wages.⁹

It is unclear how many of the Occupy Wall Street participants are interested in theological grounding for their arguments, but if any of them are, they could write the

⁸ Isaiah 58:6-8.

⁹ Jeremiah 22:13.

above verse onto banners to display at their protests. The cry of the Old Testament prophets against the injustices of the rich, in this way, is similar to the cry of the “99 percent” at political rallies. One author even wrote, “[Luke] understands God’s divine intervention to mean trouble for the high and mighty, while it is good news for the poor.”¹⁰ Perhaps it is true that God doesn’t like rich people.

But can it be that simple? Let us take a broader look at the biblical motifs regarding wealth, poverty, and injustice.

What God Wants From the Rich: Generosity and Justice

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his book *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, introduced the phrase *quartet of the vulnerable* to describe the people about whom God cares deeply. Wolterstorff shows us that throughout Scripture, God is especially interested in the well-being of four groups of impoverished people.¹¹ God calls on those with material wealth and power to care for those without such provisions. Zechariah wrote, “Thus says the Lord of hosts... show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the **widow**, the **fatherless**, the **sojourner**, or the **poor**, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”¹²

Here, Zechariah explicitly names four groups of vulnerable people: widows, orphans (fatherless), migrants (sojourners), and people who are materially poor.

Those who have wealth and power have a two-part responsibility to these four

¹⁰ Ben Witherington, *Jesus and Money: A Guide for Times of Financial Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 92.

¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 76.

¹² Zechariah 7:9-10.

groups, according to Zechariah. First, they must “show kindness and mercy” to them. Second, they are told, “do no oppress” them. In other words, they must practice justice. Wolterstorff writes,

The prophets and the psalmists do not argue the case that alleviating the plight of the lowly is required by justice. They assume it. When they speak of God’s justice, when they enjoin their hearers to practice justice, when they complain to God about the absence of justice, they take for granted that justice requires alleviating the plight of the lowly. They save their breath for urging their readers to actually *practice* justice to the quartet of the vulnerable low ones.¹³

These assumed responsibilities of championing the cause of the vulnerable are repeated throughout the Old Testament, and the theme continues into the Gospels of the New Testament. Carrying on the Old Testament prophets’ message, Jesus was very interested in care for the vulnerable. In fact, in Matthew 25, the Gospel writer records Jesus’ description of the coming judgment day “when the Son of Man comes in his glory” and “sits at his glorious throne.”¹⁴ Jesus declared that on that day he will divide his followers from his detractors, like a shepherd divides sheep from goats. His followers, he said, will be identified as those who fed the hungry, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited prisoners. His detractors will have neglected these practices during their lifetimes. It’s a binary scenario; you are either for him or you are against him, and he will know those who are for him by how much they cared for people who lacked material provision. Jesus’ description of his coming judgment is quite clear. He has given us certain terms for what it means to belong to his mission and do his work. If we follow him, we will do everything in

¹³ Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 76.

¹⁴ Matthew 25:1.

our power to share our material wealth and provision with those who lack it. According to the Bible, including the words of Jesus himself, rich people ought to be generous and seek justice for the poor.

Why is the Bible so clear about this? Why does God want the materially rich to be generous and just? According to Timothy Keller's *Generous Justice*, "[God's] grace should make you just."¹⁵ The saving mercy of God, he explains, is the engine and example for believers in how we are to treat others. People must recognize their depravity and spiritual need before receiving God's generosity. Then, having received such spiritual provision, people are to display their gratitude by mirroring God's generosity as they freely give their material resources to people who need it most. It offends God when people abuse their power and influence or are stingy with their excess resources, because such selfishness is contrary to God's character and actions. He holds all the power and influence of the universe, yet he has not abused it or been stingy with it or hoarded it for himself. He has been generous! And because he has created us to be like him, we ought to be generous as well. It is our God-given purpose to be generous with our resources and to seek justice with our influence.

As a result of these Biblical motifs of God calling people to share their resources with the poor, some have concluded that depleting our resources—intentionally becoming poor—is a way of drawing nearer to God. Marva Dawn comes close to this idea when she says that giving away our money and ourselves

¹⁵ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2010), 93-94.

“are simply movements toward the goal of being yielded to God.”¹⁶ Indeed there can be an experience of closeness with God when we move amongst the poor and serve them. I know I have personally experienced this, most poignantly when I visited one of Central America’s poorest slums in Guatemala City. I felt God’s tangible presence as I walked among people living in absolute material poverty. But does God ask people to give up their material wealth as a prerequisite condition for being in relationship with him? Jesus’ encounter with the rich ruler seems to be the only example in Scripture.¹⁷ Rather, the Bible often shows the interrelationship of generosity and blessing and asks the reader to think beyond simple measurements of wealth and poverty.

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes often about the inherent blessings of following God’s example of justice and generosity. Many of those blessings include some measurement of material reward. But others are measured in different, better, ways. For example, in Proverbs 8, the voice of Wisdom says,

Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,
granting an inheritance to those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.¹⁸

In these verses, we begin to see a definition of wealth that is broader than what can be measured in dollars or possessions. Even so, the Bible does not pit fi-

¹⁶ Marva Dawn, *Morning by Morning: Daily Meditations from the Writings of Marva J. Dawn*, ed. Karen Dismer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 55.

¹⁷ Matthew 19:21.

¹⁸ Proverbs 8:18-21.

nancial blessing against other kinds of blessing. Often they are interconnected. For example, in Deuteronomy 15, when God-through-Moses described the Sabbatical Year (which was supposed to occur once every seven years in Israel), he commanded the people to be generous to “the poor brother,”¹⁹ saying, “You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.”²⁰

According to this verse, one of the inherent blessings of generosity is a reward of blessed workmanship in the life of the giver. These kinds of nuances and broader definitions of wealth seem to be lost on the Occupy Wall Street mindset, which emphasizes only one measurement of wealth (financial) and one motivation for sharing it, namely, it’s the fair thing to do.²¹ In the Bible, wealth is sometimes measured in finances alone, and fairness is sometimes a worthy goal, but the Bible helps us see more broadly by displaying the inherent interrelatedness of godly principles—generosity, justice, mercy—and the various blessings that result from the practice of them. God’s definition of fairness goes beyond what our political discourse offers us. God’s call for justice and mercy carries with it a blessing for everyone involved and helps people respond to more than just material poverty.

Returning to the initial question of this chapter, is the gospel bad news to the rich? The answer is yes if wealth and poverty are measured in financial/material terms alone, and the answer is yes if practicing generosity and justice is a net loss for

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 15:9.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 15:10.

²¹ Jeff Sharlett, "Inside Occupy Wall Street," last modified November 10, 2011, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/occupy-wall-street-welcome-to-the-occupation-20111110>.

wealthy people. The answer is no if wealth and poverty are measured in ways that go beyond material possessions. The remainder of this chapter will begin to explore broader definitions of wealth and poverty and broader examinations of the implications of generosity and justice.

A Prayer of a Rich Man

To begin, we consider a prayer of a rich man. A materially wealthy person living in Manhattan wrote the following prayer, which is included in a booklet called *Prayers of the People* published by Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

Scripture:

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! . . . Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?*²²

Prayer:

Your Word says, ‘come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.’

What if I am not thirsty? I don’t know if I have ever truly felt a thirst that was unmet.

Your Word says, ‘He who has no money, come, buy and eat!’ What if I am not hungry? What if I do have money and can buy things, even things beyond my basic needs?

Your Word says, ‘Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy?’ Why is it, at the end of the day, when the world tells me all is well and that I should be satisfied, why is it that I get a feeling that there is something missing? Something is unfilled. I am blessed. I am not hungry, and I am not thirsty. And yet, still, I am not satisfied.

²² Isaiah 55:1-2.

Jesus, you said you are the living water, and that the ‘waters’ I can obtain through my own works will never quench the deep thirst of my soul. Even though I have known this for years, decades even, I continue to find myself lost in my own efforts. My labors have brought myriad comforts and yet made me ignore that which will satisfy my deeper needs.

When I rest in my own strength and start to think that I am no longer thirsty or hungry, I know I am lost. When I get the sense that I can take care of everything I need, Lord, please, show me my brokenness. Show me my need. Show me that the only reason my labors accomplish anything at all is by your grace and your provision. When the comforts of my life threaten to drown out the still, small voice that tells me of my need for you, let me feel my spiritual drought acutely. Bring me again and again to the place where, despite the world’s riches, I am thirsty, hungry, dying to myself—so that I may seek and find you, and in you only be satisfied.

And God forbid it that I should focus only on myself when there are in this city those who thirst, both physically and spiritually, those who have no currency, those who through addiction or mental illness are homeless and alone. Provide for them. Bless the shelters with food and money and workers. And make me ever more generous in stewarding your resources toward them.²³

This honest prayer reveals the possibility for broader definitions of wealth and poverty. The man has material wealth, yet, he hungers and thirsts spiritually. In order for Jesus to be good news to people who are materially wealthy, we need to use the kind of broader definitions this man used in his prayer.

²³ Maxwell Anderson, ed., *Prayers of the People: Enriching Your Experience with God through the Personal Prayers of Others* (New York, NY: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2016), 77. This prayer is taken from a booklet published by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in 2016. The booklet includes thirty-one daily prayers, written by members of the congregation. I include this prayer, from Day Nineteen, in its entirety, because of its precise relevance and thoughtful reflection upon the themes of this chapter.

Gospel Preaching to Materially Wealthy People

As a reminder to the reader, this thesis-project's primary focus is not on how to communicate God's *laws* about generosity and justice to people who are rich. The primary focus of this thesis-project is on how to communicate God's *gospel* to them. The difference between these two kinds of messages will become clearer when we more fully explore goals and a theological framework of preaching to the rich in *Chapter Three* and *Chapter Five*.

As we have seen in this chapter, many people throughout history have exhibited negative perceptions toward the materially wealthy. It is also true that in the Scriptures God has instructed wealthy people to reflect his generosity and justice in the world. It would be easy to link these two ideas together—people feel negatively about wealthy people, and God commands wealthy people to act justly—but the main task of this project is *not* to offer a law-based proclamation to the rich, telling them to behave differently for God's sake. No, the main task is to better understand how to communicate something that Jesus called “good news to the poor” *to* people who are materially and financially rich. In order to do this, we must look to the Bible to learn about measurements of wealth and poverty that go beyond materials and finances.

Just as Scripture sometimes defines *wealth* in terms beyond finances and possessions, as we saw in the Proverbs 8 example above, so it also defines *poverty* more broadly than we often do. We get a clear indication of this in one of Jesus' letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. While speaking to the church in Smyr-

na, Jesus makes this observation: “I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!”²⁴

It appears that the congregation in Smyrna was either materially wealthy yet impoverished spiritually, or, as Bible scholar Alan Johnson suggests, they were materially poor yet rich toward God.²⁵ In any case, we can see that Jesus, in his divinely transmitted letter to the church in Smyrna, was not bound by a singular definition of poverty. We see this truth about Jesus by examining his words and actions in the Gospels.

Blessed Are the Poor...in Spirit

Two of the Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, record Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus’ “self-revelation continued to proceed majestically, for in it he acted with absolute authority as Announcer of ‘the laws of the Kingdom.’”²⁶ Jesus’ authoritative message was given as a declaration of how things really work in his kingdom, often in contrast to how things work in the kingdom of this world. He began the sermon with the beatitudes, and began the beatitudes with the phrase, (according to Luke), “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”²⁷ This statement contains a kind of upside-down logic. In a human kingdom, rich people are blessed because they run the show, but not so in God’s kingdom. In God’s

²⁴ Revelation 2:9 (NIV).

²⁵ Alan F. Johnson, *Hebrews through Revelation*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 437.

²⁶ Norval Geldenhuys, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 209.

²⁷ Luke 6:20.

kingdom, the poor are blessed because the kingdom ultimately belongs to them. Notably, if Jesus was referring only to the *materially* poor, then we could derive an understanding that materially impoverished people alone inherit God's kingdom. Rich people would be excluded. However, Matthew's chronicling of the same sermon offers a broader definition of poverty.

Table 1. Luke 6 and Matthew 5 Parallel

Luke 6	Matthew 5
<p>²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ²² "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.</p> <p>²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. ²⁶ "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.</p>	<p>² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor <i>in spirit</i>, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p> <p>¹³ "You are the salt of the earth...</p>

According to Matthew, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”²⁸ What does this mean? George Arthur Buttrick says, “Matthew’s addition (or later gloss), *in spirit*, is needed, for poverty of itself is not blessed: it can become carking care or a worse bitterness. Thus the word *poor* covers also all who would learn, who come like children to the great book of life.”²⁹

Buttrick’s understanding of the phrase “the poor in spirit” would include people who are not simply financially or materially poor, but also those who are poor in other measurements and who acknowledge their poverty with an open posture toward receiving something they lack. In his commentary, Buttrick went on to write, “The poor in spirit are like the artist George Frederick Watts, of whom it was written that he had ‘always in his work a window left open to the infinite.’”³⁰ People who have an open window, or are in a posture of receiving, are people who have the kind of poverty necessary to receive the kingdom that Jesus described in his Sermon on the Mount. People who do have this openness but have a posture of self-sufficiency will not receive what Jesus offers. In the Lukan account, Jesus concludes the beatitudes by saying, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”³¹ If he was using the term “poor” to mean all who are in a posture of receiving, then he may have used the term “rich” simply to describe those who are not. They have already “received their consolation” and are therefore unwilling to receive anything that Jesus’ kingdom offers. Jesus’ sermon was a gospel sermon; that is, it was good news,

²⁸ Matthew 5:3, emphasis mine.

²⁹ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible Volume VII: Matthew and Mark* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 280.

³⁰ Buttrick, *Matthew and Mark*, 281.

³¹ Luke 6:24.

not just for the materially poor, but also for anyone who does not believe they have already received all that they need.

Wealth and Poverty in the Gospel of Luke

Jesus frequently addressed both the material and non-material measurements of poverty he encountered. Sections of Luke's Gospel take the reader on a journey through various types of poverty, where Jesus meets each person in his or her point of need. Jesus was good news to the poor, whether that poverty was measured in finances, relationships, or other ways. For example, in chapters 18 and 19, Luke's Gospel exhibits four types of poverty in a row, sandwiched around a foretelling of Jesus' death and resurrection:

Table 2. Types of Poverty in Luke 18 and 19

Text	Story	Type of Poverty
Luke 18:15-17	Jesus Welcomes Children	Relational (Youth)
Luke 18:18-30	The Rich Ruler	Spiritual (Pride)
<i>Luke 18:31-34</i>	<i>Jesus Foretells His Death</i>	
Luke 18:35-43	Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar	Physical (Blindness)
Luke 19:1-10	Zacchaeus	Relational (Aloneness)

In the case of the children in Luke 18:15-17, their youth was their poverty. We know from some Old and New Testament passages that in ancient Israel, children were not always treated as the prized treasures many people see them as today. In that time, women and children were not even counted when groups gathered for an

occasion.³² Children seem to have carried little social standing in the time of Jesus, which may be why the disciples rebuked the people who brought the children near Jesus.³³ Writing on Jesus' encounter with the children, N.T. Wright said, "Jesus' rebuke to the disciples rings out still today in a world where thousands of children are treated as sub-human, disposable commodities."³⁴ A child who is not treated as fully human is an impoverished person. Such children are relationally poor because they are cut off from the loving relationships of the adults around them. Jesus saw the children's relational poverty—they were cut off from him—by physically embracing them and declaring, "whoever does not *receive* the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."³⁵ His use of the word "receive" is an early clue in this section of Luke that all people must acknowledge their need (indeed their poverty) before God, however it may be measured. Someone who has no perceived measurement of poverty has no need to receive anything from anyone. Children can more easily receive the love of Jesus because they are constantly in the posture of receiving everything they need. Children have not yet grown to adulthood and begun to believe that they are self-sufficient. Jesus asked his followers to be like children in regards to their faith, and by doing so he communicated the truth that all people need to be in a receiving posture in order to obtain what Jesus offers. People need to acknowledge their poverty so that the good news of Jesus can be for them.

³² For example, Matthew 14:21.

³³ Luke 18:15.

³⁴ N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2001), 215.

³⁵ Luke 18:17, emphasis mine.

The poverty of the “rich ruler” may be more difficult to measure upon first reading, however in the middle of the story, Jesus says to him, “one thing you still *lack*.”³⁶ Why would Jesus look at a man who was “extremely rich”³⁷ and point out the fact that he lacked something? We will seek to answer this question later in this chapter. The short answer is that Jesus was most interested not in the man’s material wealth, but in his spiritual poverty. Jesus is good news to the poor, so he helped the man discover his one area of lack.

The blind beggar is perhaps the most obviously impoverished person among the four types. We first encounter him “sitting by the roadside begging.”³⁸ He lacked material resources and the means to obtain them, therefore he begged people for his daily needs. If we look beyond his obvious material poverty, however, we will see that he was actually quite rich—in faith! He is one of the few people in the Gospels who immediately recognized Jesus for who he was. As Jesus walked by him, he looked through his eyes of faith and shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”³⁹ In this statement, the man acknowledged two things: his own desperate need, and the fact that Jesus was the Messiah who could ultimately satisfy that need. He *possessed* something that the rich ruler *lacked*, namely, the ability to see his need for a Savior. Jesus approached the man and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”⁴⁰ In other words, he might have phrased it, “Which poverty would you like me to address today?” N.T. Wright wryly wonders, “How easy it would have been to ask

³⁶ Luke 18:22, emphasis mine.

³⁷ Luke 18:23.

³⁸ Luke 18:35.

³⁹ Luke 18:38.

⁴⁰ Luke 18:41a.

for money or food instead.”⁴¹ The man could have asked for anything, but he told Jesus about his most severe form of poverty. He was physically blind. “Let me recover my sight,”⁴² he said. Jesus met the man in his poverty and healed his blindness. He is good news to the poor.

Zacchaeus appears to be rich in material possessions *and* rich in faith (because he was eager to see Jesus), but impoverished in relationships. According to one Bible commentary, Zacchaeus, as the “chief tax collector,”⁴³ would have gained tremendous wealth “by lawful and unlawful methods alike.”⁴⁴ Teaming up with an oppressive Roman government, tax collectors conspired to take money from the citizens. “If you want to get a sense of how these functionaries were regarded,” says Timothy Keller, “think of what people thought of the collaborators, who, under the Nazis, oppressed their own people during World War II.”⁴⁵ Zacchaeus was completely hated by nearly everyone who knew him. His poverty, as a result, was not financial but relational. Imagine his societal isolation. Almost everyone who knew him knew him as the man who stole people’s hard-earned money. He probably had very few friends. He was despised and alone. We first encounter him scurrying up a tree in broad daylight, before a crowd of people. This is not the behavior of a person who enjoys a positive reputation in town.⁴⁶ He appeared to be all alone in that tree. The people beneath him, Luke tells us, simply grumbled about him. Jesus addressed Zacchaeus’

⁴¹ Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 219.

⁴² Luke 18:41b.

⁴³ Luke 19:2.

⁴⁴ Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, 469.

⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2009), 54.

⁴⁶ Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 59.

profound relational poverty by doing what nobody else wanted to do. He entered his home as a caring friend. In Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of the story, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today is my day to be a guest in your home.”⁴⁷ While the townspeople grumbled, Jesus chose to be a guest in his home, thus giving Zacchaeus the one thing he lacked: a loving relationship. If Jesus’s message was good news only to the financially poor, and therefore bad news to the rich, he would have simply stood with the protesters and grumbled about the unjust rich man in the tree. But in the story, Jesus’ view of Zacchaeus was different than that of the grumbling townspeople. In fact, there are three different adjectives, used by three different people, for Zacchaeus in the story. The narrator (Luke) simply calls him “rich.”⁴⁸ The townspeople call him “a sinner.”⁴⁹ What does Jesus call him? Jesus calls him “lost.”⁵⁰

Table 3. Descriptions of Zacchaeus

Voice:	Description of Zacchaeus:	Tone:
Narrator (Luke)	“Rich”	Neutral
Townspeople	“A sinner”	Judgmental
Jesus	“Lost”	Merciful

These three descriptions are very different from one another. As the narrator, Luke simply states a neutral matter of fact: Zacchaeus was financially rich. The townspeople, who had reason to dislike Zacchaeus, grumbled about him and judged

⁴⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 196.

⁴⁸ Luke 19:2.

⁴⁹ Luke 19:7.

⁵⁰ Luke 19:10.

him for his sinful actions regarding his finances. (They had this in common with the Occupy Wall Street protesters!) They called him a sinner. But Jesus, seeing Zacchaeus' deep poverty of relationship, saw him as someone who was lost. He had mercy on him because of his lost state and pursued him in love. The whole story concludes with Jesus saying, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."⁵¹ This should amaze us. Oftentimes when we think of those who are "lost," we think of those who are down-and-out, not those who are upwardly mobile. But here, Jesus said he came to seek and to save the lost, and he was talking about the man who was probably the richest person in his town. When meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus did not have a posture of pride, he had a posture to receive. By welcoming him into his home, Zacchaeus was able to acknowledge his lostness before Jesus. Like the children who received Jesus' embrace, Zacchaeus received Jesus' friendship. Both Zacchaeus and the children acknowledged their relational poverty and happily received what Jesus offered them. In his interaction with rich Zacchaeus, Jesus was good news to the poor.

In the center of these four stories of different poverties lies the true impetus behind Jesus' actions. Luke records Jesus predicting, for the third time, his own death and resurrection.⁵² All four stories hinge on these verses. Why? Ultimately Jesus would become the Year of Jubilee because he would pay the price to redeem all that has been lost because of sin. His death and his resurrection are the great outpouring of the riches of God on behalf of those who are impoverished by sinful depravity.

⁵¹ Luke 19:10.

⁵² Luke 18:31-34.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”⁵³

Jesus did not measure poverty in financial terms alone. He gave of himself freely, no matter what the specific need of the recipient was. Or, to use an analogy that he himself used, Jesus was like a doctor who treated illnesses. A rich person and a poor person alike are susceptible to virus contagions. Both need medical care. This is precisely the analogy Jesus used in Mark 2, when he had called Levi to be one of his disciples. Levi was a tax collector and likely very rich. When Jesus met Levi at his tax collection booth, he said, “Follow me.”⁵⁴ Levi obliged immediately. Soon thereafter, Jesus invited Levi to have a meal with him at the house in which Jesus was staying.⁵⁵ Levi must have invited some of his friends, because Mark’s Gospel notes that “many tax collectors”⁵⁶ joined them. Also, there were “sinners”⁵⁷ at the table. These were people who “disregarded the requirements of the Mosaic law”⁵⁸ and were generally “disreputable”⁵⁹ members of society. The group of dinner guests at Jesus’ table included rich tax collectors as well as scandalous rebels. To the observing Pharisees, this was a troubling scene. They indignantly asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”⁶⁰ Jesus, overhearing their question, respond-

⁵³ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

⁵⁴ Mark 2:14.

⁵⁵ Walter W. Wessel, *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 635.

⁵⁶ Mark 2:15.

⁵⁷ Mark 2:15.

⁵⁸ Buttrick, *Matthew and Mark*, 673.

⁵⁹ Wessel, *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 635.

⁶⁰ Mark 2:16.

ed, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”⁶¹

In this profound reply to the Pharisees, Jesus used the word “need.” Those who are well have no *need* of a physician. The message is clear. Jesus is good news to those who realize that they have need of him. If a person cannot acknowledge any area of need, then he or she has no business with Jesus. To the rich ruler, Jesus said, “One thing you still lack.” To the Pharisees concerned about his embarrassing dinner guests, Jesus communicated the same truth. People who are invited to Jesus’ table are the ones who know they lack the one thing he can give them.

The Rich Ruler

What is the one thing all people lack that Jesus alone can offer? We can begin to answer this question by more closely examining Jesus’ encounter with the rich ruler. In that story, we discover that even if a person gains everything in this world, he may lack the one thing necessary for the world to come.

The rich ruler had gained much in his life. He boasted of having not just riches, but also righteousness. Luke 18:18-21 says,

And a ruler asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’ And he said, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’

Later, in verse 23, Luke tells us that the man was “extremely rich.” His financial wealth was probably on display simply by the way he was dressed. To display

⁶¹ Mark 2:17.

his righteousness, though, the man proudly told Jesus of his accomplishments in the moral law: He did not cheat on his wife, kill anyone, steal, or lie. He even honored his parents. He displayed his righteousness as if to impress Jesus. When Jesus asked the man a rhetorical question, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone,”⁶² it may have surprised the man. No one (human) is good? This was news to the rich ruler. Thus far, the grounds of the conversation were on righteousness, but Jesus steered the conversation away from human righteousness and toward the goodness of God.

It was the kind of conversation that religious people loved to have in the time of Jesus. The rich ruler was likely called “ruler” because he was in charge of the local synagogue,⁶³ therefore he would have been accustomed to participating in conversations about goodness (that is, righteousness) every day. But Jesus was beginning to drive the conversation in a direction that would reveal something deeper than moral righteousness and its rewards.

The rich ruler’s congregation probably knew him for his moral righteousness because, as he told Jesus, he was good at following the law. The man was probably feeling quite comfortable in the beginning part of his conversation with Jesus. After Jesus named five of the Ten Commandments, the man could easily reply, “All these I have kept from my youth.”

But there are Ten Commandments, not five. A careful look at the text reveals that the list was only half of the Decalogue:

⁶² Luke 18:19.

⁶³ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible: Volume XIII: Luke and John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987).

Table 4. The Rich Ruler’s Five Commandments

“All these I have kept...” ⁶⁴ –Rich Ruler	The Ten Commandments ⁶⁵
<input type="checkbox"/>	You shall have no other gods before me.
<input type="checkbox"/>	You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything...
<input type="checkbox"/>	You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God
<input type="checkbox"/>	Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Honor your father and your mother
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You shall not murder.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You shall not commit adultery.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You shall not steal.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
<input type="checkbox"/>	You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

The rich ruler was trying to reveal his accomplishments. He was asking what he could *gain* (inherit) through righteousness, but Jesus was interested in exposing what was *missing*: “When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘*One thing you still lack*. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”⁶⁶

Jesus was interested in the lacking thing, the omission, the poverty. In a conversation about inheriting eternal life on the grounds of human righteousness, Jesus focused on how the man *did not measure up* to the whole law. Jesus invited the man to look not at his religious achievements, but at his need to receive the righteousness of his Savior. Walter Liefeld writes, “After the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and the incident of the little children, the story of the rich ruler illustrates

⁶⁴ Luke 18:21.

⁶⁵ Exodus 20.

⁶⁶ Luke 18:22, emphasis mine.

once more the need for receptiveness if one is to experience God's grace."⁶⁷ A recognition of need for a Savior may be the one thing the rich ruler lacked. This lack may have also been tied to a lack of true worship and contentment. Let us examine the missing five commandments more closely. The first four of the Ten Commandments all have to do with worshiping and honoring God, and the last one says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."⁶⁸

In the fact that he did not cite obedience to the other five laws, we can deduce that the rich ruler lacked true worship of God, and true contentment with his material possessions. The story may even imply that he did not truly worship God, but rather worshiped his possessions or his position. Richard Stearns says, "Jesus was looking into the heart of this particular man, and He saw that he had not relinquished his life unconditionally. For him, his status and stuff had become idols."⁶⁹ The story may also imply that even though he had much, he still was envious of what others had. The rich ruler was not in the spiritual posture of Asaph, who prayed in Psalm 73, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Walter L Liefeld, *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 1003.

⁶⁸ Exodus 20:17.

⁶⁹ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 38.

⁷⁰ Psalm 73:25.

When we compare Psalm 73 to the attitude of the rich ruler, who was saddened by his conversation with Jesus, we can see that Asaph was in a posture of true *worship* (like the first four commandments prescribe) and *contentment* (like the tenth commandment prescribes).

The rich ruler *lacked* what Asaph had. He lacked precisely what is prescribed in the five missing commandments: true worship of God and true contentment in him. Instead of focusing on what the rich ruler did have—indeed there were many riches in his life one could measure—Jesus simply exposed what he did not have. He exposed his poverty. Unlike the children and Zacchaeus, the rich ruler did not seem to appreciate the awareness of his own poverty, and he therefore was not willing to receive what Jesus was offering:

But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”⁷¹

Notice that Jesus did not say his famous line about the camel going through the eye of the needle until after he noticed that the man had become sad at this point in the conversation. Verse 25 says, “Jesus, *seeing that he had become sad*, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’” Jesus never had to state this particular truth to Zacchaeus, even though Zacchaeus was also very rich. Unlike the rich ruler, Zacchaeus was aware of his own poverty and therefore was willing to receive what Jesus offered. The rich ruler, however, had a negative reaction to the exposing of his spiritual poverty. He hung on to his riches and

⁷¹ Luke 18:23-25.

sense of self-righteousness and therefore could not enter the kingdom. Apparently he enjoyed his position in the community as a righteous and rich figure more than he appreciated what Jesus was offering him. When Jesus exposed the man's spiritual poverty, he was saddened. If only he had received Jesus as the truly righteous Savior he was ("No one is good except God alone"), he would have gained the one thing necessary to enter the kingdom he longed for. If he was truly content with his treasure in heaven, he could have freely given up his treasure on earth. But he was unwilling to see his life as a story of impoverishment. He held onto his material wealth at the expense of recognizing his spiritual poverty and therefore forfeited his ticket for entrance into the kingdom. For this kind of person, it is harder to enter the kingdom than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. In fact, Jesus explained, it is actually not possible unless the person allows God to supply what is needed: "Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But he said, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God.'"⁷²

Jesus' use of the word "impossible" is striking in its absoluteness. With human effort alone, salvation is impossible. It is as impossible as a camel going through the eye of a needle. This is not, as some have suggested, a metaphor about praying more. If it were so, then doing enough prayer would be sufficient for salvation. Jesus reveals here that any effort by man to be saved is *impossible*—we need a Savior.

About this verse, William Hendrickson's commentary states, "At every point, begin-

⁷² Luke 18:26-27.

ning, middle, and end, man is completely dependent on God for salvation.”⁷³ If the conversation about inheriting eternal life is on the grounds of human righteousness and following God’s law (as the rich ruler proposed it was), then we all are incapable of entering the kingdom as a result of our goodness. Because of our inability to keep the whole law, we will always *lack* true obedience. We must receive—not achieve—the kind of righteousness necessary for salvation.⁷⁴

The Apostle Paul, who in his pre-conversion life was very much like the rich ruler, later discovered what had eluded him. Paul discovered his own spiritual poverty and therefore was in a posture to receive Jesus’ imputed righteousness. As a result, he was able to give up all of his possessions and achievements for the sake of following Jesus. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.⁷⁵

In the next chapter of the same letter (Philippians 4), Paul wrote that he had “learned . . . to be content” in any circumstance, whether he experienced material plenty or want. In 1860, Charles Spurgeon preached an entire sermon on this one verse of Scripture. In the sermon, Spurgeon urged his listeners to attain to Paul’s kind of contentment, which he said could not be achieved by some stoic act of human willpower.

⁷³ William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953), 836.

⁷⁴ See Appendix E for the transcript of a sermon that compares and contrasts the Rich Ruler with the Blind Beggar.

⁷⁵ Philippians 3:8-9.

True contentment, Spurgeon urged, can only be attained by personal faith in God. Spurgeon ended his message with an admonition to the people who are wealthy, healthy, and at ease. He reminded them that one day they might experience the loss of these provisions, and if that day comes, they will wish they had their treasure in God and nothing else.⁷⁶ In the following section of this chapter we will encounter a man who learned true worship and contentment by rediscovering that his best treasure was his relationship with God.

Asaph's Journey

Long before Jesus exposed the rich ruler's poverty or Paul learned contentment, a man named Asaph lived. His journey can teach us many relevant aspects of how the good news about God can transform our understanding of financial and material wealth. His prayer can instruct preachers who are called to materially wealthy contexts by correcting some potential spiritual pitfalls into which they can fall. Asaph experienced something like a rags-to-riches story, and somewhere along the way penned a prayer that is pertinent to the topic of this project. Asaph is first mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:

These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem... These are the men who served and their sons. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman the singer the son of Joel, son of Samuel, son of ... Levi, son of Israel; and his brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, namely, **Asaph** the son of Berechiah, ... And their brothers the Levites were ap-

⁷⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, "Contentment: A Sermon," The Spurgeon Archive, March 25, 1860, accessed August 17, 2016, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0320.php>.

pointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

It is an unimpressive entrance into the Biblical narrative. Asaph simply appears next to someone else. He is listed as a musician who gets invited into the ministry of the tabernacle during King David's rule. As the story progresses, however, Asaph receives some big promotions. By the sixteenth chapter of 1 Chronicles, Asaph appears again, but he is no longer merely a musician standing next to someone else. This time he is listed as the "chief" musician.⁷⁷ Later, in 2 Chronicles, King David has died but King Solomon has risen to power. Asaph appears again. This time, Asaph is noted for his role in the dedication of the Solomon's Temple:

And all the Levitical singers, **Asaph**, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,

'For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever,'

the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.⁷⁸

In his journey within the Biblical narrative, revealed to us piece-by-piece in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Asaph went from being a happenstance bit player, to a central leader in the royal happenings of a nation. During his time in that role, he witnessed the construction of the temple. 1 Kings 9:10 says that it took Solomon twenty years to complete the project, and other Biblical narratives describe the astonishing material

⁷⁷ 1 Chronicles 16:5.

⁷⁸ 2 Chronicles 5:12-14.

riches that were included in the enormous edifice. This is important to remember as we read Asaph's prayer in Psalm 73. He would have witnessed vast amounts of gold, silver, money, and precious materials being transferred to the people in charge of the building project. These money handlers were likely some of his acquaintances.

As a chief worship leader in the Temple, what were Asaph's feelings about all of these new material riches and the people who handled them? Did it impact his view of wealth and poverty? Did it impact his view of himself and of God? The answer to all of these questions is yes, at least if we read Psalm 73 in light of the historical backdrop of what Asaph witnessed during his lifetime.

Psalm 73

Psalm 73, including verse numbers, is included here for reference:

- ¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
- ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
- ³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- ⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
- ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
- ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
- ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
- ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
- ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
- ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
- ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?

Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
 always at ease, they increase in riches.
¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
 and washed my hands in innocence.
¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
 and rebuked every morning.

¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
 I would have betrayed the generation of your children.
¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
 it seemed to me a wearisome task,
¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
 then I discerned their end.

¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places;
 you make them fall to ruin.
¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
 swept away utterly by terrors!
²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
 O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.
²¹ When my soul was embittered,
 when I was pricked in heart,
²² I was brutish and ignorant;
 I was like a beast toward you.

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
 you hold my right hand.
²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
 and afterward you will receive me to glory.
²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
 you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.
²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God;
 I have made the Lord God my refuge,
 that I may tell of all your works.

The first half of the psalm showcases one spiritual perspective, while the second half showcases a very different one. Asaph's dramatic conversion of perspective happens in a particular place, namely, the sanctuary of God. In the sanctuary,

Asaph's views of others, himself, and God are all completely transformed. His view of others went from judgmentalism to mercy. His view of himself went from self-righteousness to an awareness of his sinfulness. His view of God went from a low view to seeing God as the most precious treasure in heaven and earth.

All of these transformations happened *in the sanctuary*, which makes his experience (and his prayer) relevant to ministry leaders through the ages. If we hope to see transformed perspectives in the lives of our own congregations, we should study what happened to Asaph in the sanctuary. We should study his prayer in Psalm 73.

In the psalm, verses 1-3 serve as the prologue and give a summary of the rest of the psalm. Verses 4-12 describe Asaph's pre-sanctuary view of others and of God, while verses 13-16 describe his pre-sanctuary view of himself. The prayer hinges on verse 17a, when Asaph enters the sanctuary of God.⁷⁹

Then verses 17b-20 describe Asaph's new, post-sanctuary view of others, while verses 21-26 describe his new view of himself and of God. Lastly, verses 27 and 28 serve as the epilogue, in which Asaph reveals what he has gained and how he will respond to his experience.

Let us now examine each section more closely.

Prologue:

¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. ³ For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁷⁹ See Appendix A: Psalm 73 Transformations, for a visual graph depicting Asaph's perspective changes.

In these first three verses, Asaph tells the reader that what follows is a cautionary tale. It is a journey in which he nearly lost his faith in the God who he believes is “good to Israel” and good to “the pure in heart.” What caused his faith to be challenged? Verse three summarizes his confession: he had become envious of people who were arrogant and wicked, yet prosperous. The underlying theological assumption in Asaph’s opening statements is that if God is good to the pure in heart, then those who are not pure in heart (that is, the “wicked”) should never prosper. “The Psalmist almost lost faith, because he . . . thought that good behavior should be materially rewarded; but it was not.”⁸⁰ Asaph wrestled with the reality that some of his acquaintances were not pure in heart, yet they were receiving material blessings, a phenomenon that seemed contrary to the promises of God. But an even deeper problem arose in his theological confusion: Asaph found himself *envying*⁸¹ the wickedly prosperous, the very people he despised.

Pre-sanctuary View of Others and God:

⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.

¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹ And they say, “How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?”

¹² Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

⁸⁰ J. Clinton McCann, *The New Interpreter's Bible: 1 & 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 970.

⁸¹ Psalm 73:3.

In these verses, Asaph paints a very ugly picture of people who do not obey God yet have become materially wealthy. They enjoy a lifestyle that is “oppressive and pretentious...lived with impunity.”⁸² With pride as their necklace and violence as their garment, they seem to display their wickedness like they display their expensive jewelry and fine clothing. They strut through the earth like a bully on a playground: all arrogance, no humility. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, “[Asaph] gives us the most perfect picture in all of literature of the so-called successful man of the world. He even describes his posture, his arrogant appearance, with his eyes standing out with fatness and his pride compassing about him as a chain—a necklace . . . What a perfect description it is.”⁸³

When his acquaintances prospered, Asaph was unable to “rejoice with those who rejoice.”⁸⁴ He shows that this is one of the hardest things to do. Reading the psalm, we can feel Asaph’s utter disgust with the people he describes. His perspective is entirely horizontal as he judges their obvious sinfulness. In looking sideways at his rich acquaintances, Asaph compared and despaired. He convinced himself that “they alone were the cause of his problem.”⁸⁵ Worse, he is disappointed to report that as a result of the wicked becoming materially rich, other acquaintances are losing their faith in God. They ask, “How can God know”⁸⁶ anything about this? As Asaph dwells on his disgust with the rich, his view of God becomes quite low as well. Per-

⁸² McCann, *Psalms*, 968.

⁸³ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 21.

⁸⁴ Romans 12:15.

⁸⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 112.

⁸⁶ Psalm 73:11.

haps God's promises of rewarding the faithful are just empty words. The people even appear to mock God as they ask if "the Most High" God contains any knowledge at all.

At this point in the psalm, Asaph stands atop a mound of judgment, pointing his finger, both at the materially wealthy, and at the seemingly idiotic God who rewards them unjustly.

Pre-sanctuary View of Self:

¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.
¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

As he points out the ugly sin in others, Asaph only sees purity and righteousness in his own heart. He feels as though his own striving to keep God's moral law—keeping his heart clean and washing his innocent hands—has been all in vain. This line of thinking continues a low view of God of the previous verses, and positions Asaph himself as the only righteous figure among a corrupt and confused people. The washing of hands is likely a reference to obedience to the Torah,⁸⁷ with its many ritual cleansing rites. In this pre-sanctuary mindset, Asaph is very much like the rich ruler, who expected to be rewarded by God for his diligence to the moral laws of scripture.

⁸⁷ George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible Volume IV: Psalms and Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), 389.

The formula was not working well for Asaph. Trying to earn God's favor through self-righteous obedience only led him to a sense of entitlement. He thought he deserved material rewards for his religious lifestyle, and he thought the rich deserved punishment for their wickedness. Finding himself in the vicious cycle of judgmentalism and self-righteousness, Asaph finally exasperated himself, exclaiming, "When I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task."⁸⁸

Alone in his insolence and weary from his disappointments, Asaph brought himself to the only place his problem could ultimately be solved. He went into the sanctuary.

Sanctuary Experience:

¹⁷until I went into the sanctuary of God;

Asaph placed this phrase in the center of his heartfelt prayer. It serves as "the turning point"⁸⁹ between everything that precedes it and everything that comes after it. Like a hinge upon which a door swings in two directions, Asaph's sanctuary experience swung his entire mindset from one direction to another.

What happened in the sanctuary? Bible scholar Willem A. VanGemenen surmises, writing, "Overwhelmed by the greatness, glory, and majesty of God, the psalmist regained a proper perspective of his situation."⁹⁰ J. Clinton McCann adds, "Perhaps [he witnessed] a priestly oracle of salvation, some sort of festal presentation,

⁸⁸ Psalm 73:16.

⁸⁹ McCann, *Psalms*, 968.

⁹⁰ Willem A. VanGemenen, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank. E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 480.

a Levitical sermon, or some kind of mystical experience.”⁹¹ We know that in the time of Asaph, worship centered on the presence of Yahweh in the Ark of the Covenant and in the Holy of Holies. Asaph was literally present during the ceremony that installed these features!⁹² He knew as well as anyone that when he entered the sanctuary, he entered into the very presence of God. Lloyd-Jones adds, “The people under the old dispensation when they went to the Temple they went there to meet with God. It was the place in which God’s honour dwelt; it was the place where the Shekinah glory of God was present. [Asaph] was entering in to the presence of God.”⁹³

He not only experienced the manifest presence of God, he likely also heard a “priestly oracle of salvation,” as McCann suggests. (This is especially relevant to the central theme of this project, and I will address it again in *Chapter Five*.)

Like a car wash clears away the dirt and grime on a car’s front windshield, helping the driver see more clearly, so being in God’s presence gave Asaph a clearer perspective.

Post-sanctuary View of Others:

then I discerned their end. ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

Asaph looks again at the same people he judged and despised before entering the sanctuary. Notably, his gaze is no longer horizontal: he no longer only refers to

⁹¹ McCann, *Psalms*, 968.

⁹² 1 Chronicles 16:4-6.

⁹³ Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 47.

“they” and “them” when talking about the wickedly rich. He no longer refers to God as that impotent character who doesn’t know anything. As if looking directly into God’s face, Asaph now says, “*You* set them in slippery places.”⁹⁴ Asaph had earlier described the rich as people who strut through the earth with some kind of arrogant swagger. But looking again at them, he sees how insecurely they walk through life, like a person who easily slips and falls on dicey surfaces. When compared to the power of God, whom Asaph encountered in the sanctuary, the wickedly rich do not appear quite as impressive. In fact, Asaph seems to have pity on them. He began the prayer on a high mound of finger-pointing judgment, but he concludes it by feeling sorry for the pitiful estate of those he had been judging. If God were to truly deal with the sinfulness of the wickedly rich, he could annihilate them as easily as a phantom. VanGemeren adds, “The wicked are like ‘a dream,’ which has a sense of reality when one is asleep but is gone at the moment of awakening.”⁹⁵ The rich were so garish and dominating in Asaph’s consciousness before his sanctuary experience, but post-sanctuary experience, he just feels sorry for them.

Post-sanctuary View of Self and God:

²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²² I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

⁹⁴ Psalm 73:18, emphasis mine.

⁹⁵ VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 481.

Before he entered the sanctuary, Asaph's self-view was quite high. He polished trophies of "purity" and "innocence" and placed them on the mantle for God to consider and be impressed. But looking back on that self-absorbed attitude, Asaph confessed that in reality his "soul was embittered," he was "pricked in heart," and he was even "brutish and ignorant" toward God.⁹⁶ These behaviors are the behaviors of a beast, which operates purely on animalistic instincts rather than on higher principles. Here, Asaph experienced a dramatically changed self-view; it is possibly the most striking transformation in the prayer. Before his sanctuary experience, Asaph thought of himself as an entitled, righteous exemplar, unjustly wronged by an ignorant God. After his sanctuary experience, he realized how those thoughts, while superficially impressive, were actually rather beastlike. Like the Apostle Paul, who came to compare his own accomplishments to a pile of rubbish⁹⁷, Asaph gained a new, less flattering view of his previous self-righteousness.

Asaph's view of God also radically changed. Whereas previously Asaph mentioned mockery of God, now he remembered God's presence and his preciousness. Still gazing at God, Asaph declares, "I am continually with you; you hold my right hand."⁹⁸ In his pre-sanctuary state, Asaph felt very much alone. But post-sanctuary, he recalls the wonderful fact that God never left his side. God never stopped holding his hand, guiding his steps even when he walked in slippery places. Not only is God present, he is also precious. Considering his best treasure, Asaph wonders, "Whom have I in heaven but you?" And then he makes a telling statement

⁹⁶ Psalm 73:21-22.

⁹⁷ Philippians 3:8.

⁹⁸ Psalm 73:23.

that once again reveals the envy he had mentioned in the prologue. Thinking back on all those material possessions that the wicked had gained, Asaph reconsiders their value, saying, “There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.”⁹⁹ Compared to the preciousness of God, all earthly possessions are undesirable. Those things will pass away, but a relationship with God lasts forever. Asaph closes his prayer (before offering the epilogue), with the wonderful declaration, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”¹⁰⁰ While Asaph’s heart was occupied despising *and* envying the wickedly rich, he had forgotten this profound truth: God is everything he needs and will ever need.

Epilogue:

²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

In the end, Asaph “came to realize [that] true goodness, happiness, and peace consist of a different kind of reward—the experience of God’s presence.”¹⁰¹ Before he had his perspective-altering sanctuary experience, Asaph was measuring wealth and poverty only in terms of finances and material possessions. This led him to bitterness, envy, and even a near-loss of faith. But when he worshiped God in the sanctuary, his perspective on wealth expanded into a much wider view; he was able to see clearly the spiritual poverties that can accompany material wealth, and he remembered his truest treasure, being close to God.

⁹⁹ Psalm 73:25.

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 73:26.

¹⁰¹ McCann, *Psalms*, 970.

Asaph was a worship leader in the Temple, and his experience can inform today's worship leaders and preachers. They, too, can have their perspectives about wealth change, especially if they are called to lead materially wealthy people. And, if gospel preaching in today's sanctuaries can create for congregations an environment similar to the one Asaph experienced, then congregations can have similar transformations of heart. We will return to this idea in *Chapter Five*.

In seeking to answer the question about whether the gospel is bad news to the rich, we have seen in this chapter that the Bible does require generosity and justice from people who have resources, but the good news of Jesus is for all people. What he called good news to the poor is relevant to anyone who can find any measurement of need in his or her life. The Bible measures wealth and poverty in terms beyond materials and finances, therefore we can too. As preachers of the gospel, pastors in materially wealthy congregations can address the spiritual and relational poverty in the lives of their flocks. They can preach good news to the poor. They can help their people see, as Asaph did, that their truest treasure is in heaven, and that nothing on earth compares with it.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two takes a mostly exegetical approach to the topic, unpacking some key Biblical passages in order to develop a theological understanding of the gospel, various measurements of poverty, and implications for preachers seeking to preach good news to the poor. The first half of this chapter continues some Biblical exegesis but also reviews several contemporary scholars on three topics: Preaching, The Gospel, and Spiritual Poverty Amidst Material Wealth. These three topics are organized around the project's banner statement from Jesus, when he declared that he had been anointed to "*proclaim good news to the poor.*"¹

Table 5. Chapter Three Organization

Jesus' words:	Chapter topics:
"Proclaim...	Preaching
...good news...	The Gospel
...to the poor."	Spiritual Poverty Amidst Material Wealth

The second half of this chapter reviews some authors who propose various approaches to communicate with people who are materially rich: some attempt to motivate them to use their wealth for social justice, some attempt to communicate the gospel to them, and some attempt to understand the role of the gospel preacher in a materially wealthy congregation.

¹ Luke 4:18.

Topic 1: Preaching

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”² Charles Hodge, in his commentary on Romans, says that the transmission of faith, therefore, comes in a “message designed for the ear.”³ The message is something that people “must *receive* and rest upon as true.”⁴ In the same chapter in Romans, Paul asks, “And how are [people] to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”⁵ Then Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah, saying, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”⁶

In these words from Paul, we see that preaching is of central importance to the spreading of the gospel, and therefore to the expansion of God’s kingdom. The Christian faith does not spread merely as a good feeling, or some kind of mystical force, or even as a social justice movement. To advance the kingdom, we do not say to each other, “May the force be with you,” nor do we simply go around doing charitable acts. We announce the kingdom; we preach the good news. Verbal proclamation is of first importance in the spreading of the Christian faith. Furthermore, the kingdom is expanded not simply by commanding people to behave differently, or by teaching them correct theology. These activities can be fruit of the gospel, but the gospel itself is something heralded, believed, and then lived.

² Romans 10:17.

³ Charles Hodge, *Romans, Geneva Series Commentaries* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1835; repr., 1997), 348.

⁴ Hodge, *Romans*. Emphasis mine, 348.

⁵ Romans 10:14-15.

⁶ Romans 10:15.

Even in the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets, God's people exhibited a strong desire to proclaim the good news. In Asaph's Psalm 73, after he had experienced God's grace in the sanctuary and gained a new faith perspective, he concluded his prayer by saying,

But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
*that I may tell of all your works.*⁷

Similarly, the Prophet Isaiah instructed the people of God to

Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, *herald of good news*;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Behold your God!"⁸

As we see in these examples, there were times in the Old Testament period when God moved among his people and they were inspired to herald the news about what had happened. This news spread like wildfire, making God's name known among the peoples of the earth.

In the same way, the good news about Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension was communicated from the voices of believers to the ears and hearts of unbelievers. Thus far in history, the wildfire of good news has not been extinguished.

In this ever-spreading blaze, a new spark was lit on the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In the familiar Christmas story, an angel from heaven *proclaimed* to

⁷ Psalm 73:28, emphasis mine.

⁸ Isaiah 40:9, emphasis mine.

the shepherds the “good news of great joy.”⁹ The shepherds heard the message, ran and saw the Christ child, then they, too, “made known”¹⁰ the good news to others. Likewise, on the morning of the resurrection, Jesus instructed Mary to tell the disciples what she had witnessed, so “Mary Magdalene *went and announced* to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord!’”¹¹ In experiencing Jesus’ work or in hearing the news about him, people throughout history have turned and told others, who have turned and told others, and so on, until today when preachers and evangelists keep the wild-fire spreading.

Although human communicators of the gospel are agents in this phenomenon, the ultimate power of it does not rest on them. Biblical preaching, as a continuation of the movement that began long ago, depends on the Holy Spirit for continued success. The early events of the movement are recorded in the Bible, thus Biblical preaching simply reveals to the congregation what has happened in history as described in the inspired word of God. The legitimacy of each message does not rest on the clout of the preacher but on the fact that the Bible is inspired by God to tell us the gospel events of history. Haddon Robinson writes, “The authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher but in the biblical text.”¹² Gospel preachers must rely on the Spirit’s power and authority in order to truly preach the gospel.

Whenever the message of Jesus is clearly proclaimed by the Spirit’s power, it has a multiplying effect. Throughout the history of the Christian movement, the mes-

⁹ Luke 2:10.

¹⁰ Luke 2:17.

¹¹ John 20:18, emphasis mine.

¹² Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), 23.

sage has reverberated in the lives of literally billions of people. When preachers preach the word today, the message “doesn’t just sound once,” according to Jonathan Leeman, author of *Reverberation: How God’s Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People*. “[The Word] echoes or reverberates” through the congregation, then “down the street, and into the members’ homes and workplaces.”¹³ The word *reverberate* is a fitting way to describe the effect of gospel preaching. At its core is the word “verb”—a declaration that has an echoing, multiplying effect. It reverberates. Those who hear it become those who do it and speak it, thus creating more hearers as the reverberation echoes through communities.

Reverberation of the gospel began with the news of Jesus, but it continues today. None of us today is as fortunate as the shepherds on Christmas night, or Mary on Resurrection morning; we have not personally witnessed the incarnated Jesus. But we are still witnesses who report the good news about him.

When the gospel is preached, the reverberating word of God is like rain falling from the sky. It does not return to the sky before it nourishes the earth and produces fruit across the land.¹⁴ Functionally, gospel preaching nourishes in four ways. First, it reveals Christ; second, it brings glory to God; third, it calls people to obedience and inspires generosity and justice; and fourth, it changes people’s eternal destinies.

¹³ Jonathan Leeman, *Reverberation: How God’s Word Brings Light, Freedom, and Action to His People* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 25.

¹⁴ Isaiah 55:11.

Gospel Preaching Reveals Christ

When we proclaim the good news, we don't just reveal *information about* what happened two thousand years ago in Israel, we reveal the risen Christ himself: "God is revealed in Christ, Christ is revealed in the Word, and the Word is revealed by the preacher."¹⁵ Roman Catholics have long believed that Jesus is literally present in the sacrament of Holy Communion, but most Protestant theology espouses the idea that Jesus is present Spiritually (not physically) at the table *and* in the preaching of the word. Not only is Jesus alive and present in believers' hearts through faith (e.g. 2 Corinthians 13:5, and several other places), he is also present through the proclamation of his word. Gospel preachers are merely ushers who bring the congregation into proximity with their Savior. He is the better teacher and counselor, and a humble preacher will know his or her role is to usher the congregation into his presence.

Gospel Preaching Brings Glory to God

People who experience the risen Christ, revealed in the word by the presence of the Holy Spirit, are awed by God's glory. In the example of Asaph, his sanctuary encounter with God resulted in him expressing a desire to tell the world about the awesomeness of God. He concluded his prayer with this declaration, saying, "that I may tell of all your works."¹⁶ He did not say, "That I may tell of my awesome personal experience," or even, "That I may relish privately in the wonder of the moment." He wanted to tell the world about how great God is. The telling of the good

¹⁵ Steven W. Smith, *Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 72.

¹⁶ Psalm 73:28.

news brings glory and fame to the reputation of God. It does not bring glory and fame to the reputation of man. In fact, the good news is not about man's actions but God's actions. Therefore, gospel preaching is different than other forms of communication that aim to motivate people to inner change or outward service. Gospel preaching is the dissemination of the good news about God's saving work, and it is therefore focused primarily on God, not humans. John Piper, in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, writes,

[My message is that] the dominant note of preaching be the freedom of God's sovereign grace, that the unifying theme be the zeal that God has for his own glory, that the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and that the pervasive atmosphere of preaching be the holiness of God.¹⁷

Preaching, then, does even more than simply communicate good news. A newspaper, or an email chain, or even a Twitter account can do that. Preaching reverberates the power of the word to everyone who hears it and brings glory to God in the world.

Gospel Preaching Calls People to Obedience and Inspires Generosity and Justice

Preaching calls people to true obedience to God's laws. Hearts that were once rebellious against the commands of God now have a willingness to obey them. Like a tree bears fruit, the gospel prompts a response. Think of the shepherds who heard the good news from the angels. They immediately ran to find the child, then they went and told others. They were never the same after that night! Yet, all they

¹⁷ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 24.

did was receive the news and then act upon what they had heard. Somebody could have sent them a letter that contained commands: Step 1) Go to Bethlehem; Step 2) Tell people about what you saw there; etc. But the shepherds' actions weren't merely a dutiful response to commands; they were a spontaneous, organic reaction to the news they had been told. The news inspired an obvious, active, free response. Gospel preaching does the same.

Andy Stanley, a megachurch pastor in Atlanta, GA, espouses the idea that the goal of preaching is to “teach people how to live a life that reflects the values, principles, and truths of the Bible.”¹⁸ Stanley is correct to say that the Bible has application for people's lives, but he misses the primary distinctive of what makes gospel preaching unique, namely, that it proclaims the good news about *Jesus' divine work* more than it calls humans toward human work. Alternatively, John Piper's approach reminds preachers to glorify God in their preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit's presence in the sanctuary, giving opportunity for the Holy Spirit to bear fruit in the lives of the hearers. “Make the tree good and its fruit will be good,”¹⁹ he writes. In this way, gospel preaching causes true obedience and inspired action in the lives of the congregation, insofar as the Spirit bears his fruit in them.

When people internalize the truth of God's great love—his generosity in giving his life and his justice in atoning for sin—they are inspired to emulate what they have internalized. Having received such generosity, they become more generous. Having been the beneficiaries of justice, they turn and fight for justice for others.

¹⁸ Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 95.

¹⁹ Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 85.

Love begets love, and the good news begets good actions.

Gospel Preaching Impacts the Eternal Destinies of the Hearers

Preaching also impacts the eternal futures of the people who hear the word. Saving “faith comes from hearing,”²⁰ therefore the simple act of preaching has an impact that will outlast the earthly lives of the hearers. As Haddon Robinson wrote, preaching “takes place so that through it the Holy Spirit may change people’s lives and destinies.”²¹ There is a mystery in this. God’s sovereignty governs the spreading of the gospel so that people will hear the word that determines their destinies. In the first chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul explains:

In [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, *when you heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.²²

Chapter Five expands on these ideas and offers preachers a theological framework for gospel preaching that allows materially wealthy congregations to hear the gospel as it reveals Christ, brings glory to God, calls them to obedience, and impacts their destinies.

²⁰ Romans 10:17.

²¹ Haddon W. Robinson and Scott M. Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 66.

²² Ephesians 1:11-13, emphasis mine.

Topic 2: The Gospel (And What the Gospel Is Not)

Chapter One describes the gospel as *good news not good advice* and explains how the gospel is a proclamation of the events concerning God's saving work through Jesus Christ. This lays some groundwork for the subsequent chapters' dealings with the gospel as good news and how that affects our approach to preaching to the rich. This section reviews Michael Horton's *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, to gain an understanding of how some preachers have fallen into the fallacy that the gospel is "good advice," while moving away from good news as proclamation. We can learn what the gospel *is* by studying what it *is not*, and how a non-gospel message impacts the lives of the hearers. This will become important later in the chapter as we explore the various ways people have tried to reach the materially rich through non-gospel messaging.

According to Horton, the gospel itself has become the missing ingredient in much of American Christianity. Something actually antithetical to the good news is being preached on Sundays. In the book, Horton diagnoses the problem, which he says spans the liberal-conservative spectrum²³ and pervades even the church traditions based on Christ-centered preaching. He describes the resulting theology as semi-Pelagianism, moralistic therapeutic deism,²⁴ and law-based righteousness.

Horton explains some of the reasons people are attracted to these kinds of theologies: "Focusing the conversation on us—our desires, needs, feelings, experience,

²³ Michael Scott Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 27.

²⁴ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 29ff.

activity, and aspirations—energizes us,”²⁵ he says. Horton continues his diagnosis by writing, “We come to church, it seems, less to be transformed by the Good News than to celebrate our own transformation and to receive fresh marching orders for transforming ourselves and our world.”²⁶

As a result, says Horton, our view of God has changed:

God is used as a personal resource rather than known, worshiped and trusted; Jesus Christ is a coach with a good game plan for our victory rather than a Savior who has already achieved it for us; salvation is more a matter of having our best life now than being saved from God’s judgment by God himself; and the Holy Spirit is an electrical outlet we can plug into for the power we need to be all that we can be.²⁷

When people don’t hear the good news about God’s saving work, and instead focus mostly on their own work, they lose sight of the supremacy of God. “As a result,” Horton writes, “religious speech becomes assimilated to the pragmatic rationality of rules, steps, techniques, and programs for personal transformation and well-being.”²⁸

Over time, this phenomenon leads inevitably to weariness among churchgoers, who agonize under constant law beating instead of being liberated by the good news. Horton writes, “Calling us to accomplish great things for God is part of the hype that constantly burns out millions of professing Christians.”²⁹ Horton has a solution for this error. “Telling us about the great things God has accomplished . . . and more than that, actually delivering his achievement to sinners—is the real mission of

²⁵ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 16.

²⁶ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 19.

²⁷ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 19.

²⁸ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 51.

²⁹ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 211.

the church. And it might even put wind in the sails of those among us whom God *has* called to extraordinary achievements!”³⁰

Michael Horton’s diagnosis of the American Church seems accurate. If true, then this non-gospel style of preaching to the materially rich would only cause them to focus on themselves. They might change their behaviors, but they would not be bearing the fruit of the gospel in a spontaneous, organic way. They might bring some honor to themselves but no glory to God.

Horton’s solution to his diagnosis is to bring correct doctrine about Christ back into preaching in America. “The church needs a second Reformation, to be sure, but one that—like the first one—returns the church’s focus to Christ and his work.”³¹ He describes the Christian’s response to God’s redeeming work as one of grateful obedience to the law. This is true! But it also omits one ingredient.

What Horton’s argument lacks is a good understanding of who our Trinitarian God is for us *now*, and how God’s presence—in all three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—can be an acting agent in the faith community even today. Yes, we need to bring correct doctrine about Jesus’ work back into preaching, but we also need to bring the “present risenness”³² of Christ and the dwelling presence of the full Godhead back into our worship services.

³⁰ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 211.

³¹ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 216.

³² Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, expanded ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 79.

Horton argues, “Christ delivers himself to us through the preaching of the gospel . . . baptism . . . and the Lord’s supper.”³³ Horton imagines Jesus saying to his disciples, “I will continue bringing you the gift [of myself] through my ambassadors whom I send.”³⁴ Christ *is* present with us when we are hearing the word preached, being baptized, and partaking of the supper. But God the Father is also with us, as he is “enthroned in the praises of his people”³⁵ during our worship services. Jesus is “there among us” when “two or more are gathered in [his] name.”³⁶ But he also promised that his followers would know the Holy Spirit, “for he dwells with you and will be in you.”³⁷ If we return to Asaph’s prayer, which obviously preceded the advent of Christ, we recall that he came to a place of knowing that God held his right hand, and that being near to God was the best kind of life imaginable. The gospel is good news because, even before the incarnation of Christ, God was merciful to the poor (of all measurements of poverty) as he met their needs throughout history and offered himself to them. The entire Godhead continues today to bless the spiritually and materially impoverished.

Michael Horton has done an excellent job indicting “Christless” religion, reminding us of the gospel purpose of preaching and how it has been lost in many of our churches. But there is more to God than what Jesus did on the cross, and even more to Jesus than what is “delivered” in the sacraments and in preaching. If God is still a living being, then he is alive today—alive in our hearts, in our worship, in our

³³ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 219.

³⁴ Horton, *Christless Christianity*, 219.

³⁵ Psalm 22:3.

³⁶ Matthew 18:20.

³⁷ John 14:17.

fellowship. This is an important thing to remember when preaching the gospel to people who are spiritually impoverished and depraved because God's active presence is necessary to convict people of sin and transform their hearts.

As we remember the true meaning of the gospel, we will be mindful of the condition of people who are materially wealthy yet spiritually impoverished. In the next section, we will see that many authors focus primarily on how the materially wealthy should *do more* to share their wealth with the poor. But admonishing people to share their resources is not technically gospel preaching, as Horton has shown us. Effective preachers to materially wealthy people see them as people in need of receiving the good news to the poor. Effective preachers look for possible measurements of relational spiritual poverty amidst material wealth.

Topic 3: Relational and Spiritual Poverty Amidst Material Wealth

In 1994, Mother Teresa visited the United States to give a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. She centered her remarks mostly on the subject of abortion, but she interweaved a narrative about material and spiritual poverty. Her travels, from the dust of India to the opulence of the United States, seemed to have startled her—she said she was “surprised at the West.”³⁸ The visit awakened her to the reality of deep poverties that cannot be measured materially. As she spoke, she contrasted the hungry people in India, who smiled when she served them a plate of rice, with people living in the U.S. who long for something else. A person who has

³⁸ Mother Teresa, "Whatsoever You Do...," Priests for Life, February 3, 1994, accessed August 15, 2016, <http://www.priestsforlife.org/brochures/mtspeech.html>.

every material comfort but who feels neglected, Mother Teresa explained, has a poverty that cannot be solved with a plate of rice. She described her visit to a retirement home in which wealthy people were relationally impoverished:

I can never forget the experience I had in visiting a home where they kept all these old parents of sons and daughters who had just put them into an institution and forgotten them. I saw that in that home these old people had everything—good food, comfortable place, television, everything, but everyone was looking toward the door. And I did not see a single one with a smile on the face. I turned to Sister and I asked: “Why do these people who have every comfort here, why are they all looking toward the door? Why are they not smiling?” I am so used to seeing the smiles on our people, even the dying ones smile. And Sister said: “This is the way it is nearly every day. They are expecting, they are hoping that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They are hurt because they are forgotten.” And see, this neglect to love brings spiritual poverty.³⁹

Mother Teresa’s vivid illustration is descriptive of the relational and spiritual poverty that permeates the wealthy communities of the United States. In her estimation, spiritual poverty caused by relational neglect is “much harder to solve”⁴⁰ than material poverty. Kenneth Gergen, a social psychologist, estimates that more than twenty new psychological problems have arisen in the twentieth century as a result of the social emphasis on self-fulfillment through material advancement. These problems include extreme levels of anxiety, bulimia and anorexia, low self-esteem, and more.⁴¹ In fact, it seems that there is a correlation between material advancement and inner psychological conflict.

³⁹ Teresa, “Whatsoever You Do...”.

⁴⁰ Teresa, “Whatsoever You Do...”.

⁴¹ Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991), 13.

How did we end up this way? How did the United States, which ostensibly was founded by people of faith, create an environment in which relational and spiritual poverty could sprout?

In *Our Great Big American God*, Paul Matthew Turner says, “In our efforts to make God known, we’ve quite possibly turned God into something that resembles us, a big fat American with an ever-growing appetite for more.”⁴² Turner then gives a historical analysis of how the theology of the American Christian community evolved from Puritan times to our current age. It went from a simplistic, minimalistic theology to an utterly materialistic mindset. For example, “Even though Jesus talked about storing up treasures in heaven, many of America’s preachers during the 1950s and 1960s were caught up in the emerging prosperity gospel movement.”⁴³ The Christian message, Turner argues, has reflected the rise of America’s quest for material abundance more than it has reflected the message of the Bible. One of Turner’s main theses is that American culture has influenced Christian theology as much as Christian theology has influenced American culture.⁴⁴

Where has all this striving for material abundance within culture and within the church landed us? “Given the enormous temptations to sin that always accompa-

⁴² Matthew Paul Turner, *Our Great Big American God: A Short History of Our Ever-Growing Deity* (New York, NY: Jericho Books, 2014), 10.

⁴³ Turner, *Our Great Big American God*, 185.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Our Great Big American God*, 7.

ny wealth,” writes Michael S. Hamilton in *Christianity Today*, “it is a bit surprising that we have displayed so little ambivalence at the wealth that is now in our hands.”⁴⁵

In *The Price of Privilege*, Madeline Levine tells us, “Parental pressure and material advantage are creating a generation of disconnected and unhappy kids.”⁴⁶ Members of rich households, kids and adults alike, tend to be overscheduled and under extreme pressure to perform well in order to maintain an expected level of excellence and affluence. Children are constantly attending sports practices or academic tutoring sessions while parents are constantly attending work meetings or physical workouts. As a result, each member of the affluent household is relationally isolated from the people within their own nuclear families. In a rich family’s lifestyle, living in the same house with people does not necessarily result in being relationally intertwined with them. In the case of affluent suburban moms, Levine says, relational isolation can be particularly acute. “Affluent women are the least likely of any socioeconomic group of unhappy women to seek help for their problems.”⁴⁷ This happens to affluent moms because of their “impossibly high standards,” their “commitment to never appear either self-absorbed or vulnerable,” and a constant guarding of privacy, “lest the façade of perfection be torn away.”⁴⁸ Even those who are materially wealthy

⁴⁵ Michael S. Hamilton, “We’re in the Money! How Did Evangelicals Get So Wealthy and What Has It Done to Us?,” *Christianity Today*, June 12, 2000, accessed August 16, 2016. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/june12/1.36.html>.

⁴⁶ Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006).

⁴⁷ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 205.

⁴⁸ Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 205.

can be relationally poor. An anecdotal story related to this is offered in *Chapter Four*.

In his book *Too Much of a Good Thing*, Dan Kindlon examines the challenges of raising Christian children in households awash in material wealth. Early in the book, Kindlon points out the fact that we are living in a new gilded era. Even so, people never seem satisfied with all that they have. “Houses are, on average, twice as big as they were in the 1950s. The average new car now costs \$22,000, almost double what it cost a decade ago.”⁴⁹ What causes this constant desire for more material possessions? Kindlon says that envy of others’ goods causes it. He borrows the phrase “luxury fever” from a Cornell economist named Robert Frank, who suggests that envy and comparison of others make us all sick with an insatiable desire for more.⁵⁰ Just as the psalmist Asaph dwelled feverishly on the possessions and wickedness of his acquaintances, so all of us can fall into a mode of comparing and despairing.

Kindlon develops what he calls the “Seven Syndromes of Indulgence,”⁵¹ which he ties to the traditional seven deadly sins:

⁴⁹ Dan Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age* (New York, NY: Miramax Books, 2001), 31.

⁵⁰ Robert H. Frank, *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 70.

Table 6. Syndromes of Indulgence

Syndrome of Indulgence	Deadly Sin
Self-centeredness	Pride
Anger	Wrath
Drivenness	Envy
Lack of Motivation	Sloth
Eating Disorders	Gluttony
Problems with Self-control	Lust
Acting Spoiled	Greed

Kindlon argues that these syndromes harm the person as well as the relationships tied to him or her. A person “afflicted with one or more of these syndromes is likely to bring sadness to those who love them.”⁵² Over seven chapters, Kindlon expounds upon each indulgence caused by material excesses. For example, in the chapter on eating disorders, he examines the terrible irony that some rich people, even when presented with such a smorgasbord of food options, can sometimes be unhealthily skinny. At the same time, some poor people, because of the prevalence of unhealthy ingredients in lower-cost foods, can sometimes be unhealthily overweight. Why does this irony exist? “How our bodies look . . . is not only relevant to physical health, but, like fashion, also indicates social class.”⁵³ In this way, the materially rich can often be physically bankrupt, while the materially poor can often be physically profuse. Measurements of poverty aren’t always what they appear at first glance.

In his chapter entitled “Being Spoiled,” based on the deadly sin of greed, Kindlon talks about our “split personality” regarding our relationship with material possessions. On the one hand, “Most of us believe too much of a good thing can be

⁵² Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 70.

⁵³ Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 138.

toxic,” he says. On the other hand, polls show that almost everyone wants to be more rich.⁵⁴ The only remedy for this inner conflict, says Kindlon, is to have healthy family relationships as well as to commonly practice serving others who are poorer than you are.⁵⁵ Relational poverty and self-centeredness appear to be at the root of the spiritual poverties that afflict the materially wealthy.

Kindlon concludes his book with practical advice for parents raising children in an age of indulgence, including tips on “allowance, chores, rules, inheritance, and more.”⁵⁶ These are good things for parents to teach their children, but Kindlon’s book lacks a spiritual remedy for the relational poverty that many rich people feel. We will explore this idea further in the next section.

Topic 4: How To Evangelize the Rich

Subtopic A: A Law-Based Approach to Reaching Wealthy People

It can be tempting for preachers to use a law-based approach when preaching to materially wealthy people. Leading with a message that points out the injustices caused by the rich, preachers can then persuade people to change their behaviors and begin acting more justly. This approach simply communicates God’s laws regarding material wealth, which are outlined in the Bible, and instructs people to follow those laws. Communicators point out the huge discrepancies in wealth distribution between the rich and the poor, then unload several Bible passages in which God calls people to

⁵⁴ Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 165-6.

⁵⁵ Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 177.

⁵⁶ Kindlon, *Too Much of a Good Thing*, 197.

act justly with their wealth and influence, thereby caring for the quartet of the vulnerable in human societies. Ronald J. Sider, in his book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, basically takes this approach. In the opening chapters, he includes charts and graphs showing the vast amount of financial wealth in the United States, compared with our abysmal rates of charitable giving. Sider even compares charitable giving rates with military spending, and showcases the fact that billions more dollars are spent on bombs and tanks than on food and water for the world's poorest populations. He goes on to expose various ways rich Americans rationalize their affluence, such as "lifeboat ethics," which discourages rich people from giving to the poor. The mindset suggests that if the rich get into lifeboats with the poor, then everyone sinks. "If we eat together today," the wisdom goes, "we will all starve together tomorrow."⁵⁷ He also exposes "trickle-down wealth" as a falsified philosophy that rich Americans nonetheless use to rationalize injustices. Sider tells a story of informing his wealthy friend that "if he spent \$100,000 less on Jaguars and used that \$100,000 for direct economic empowerment of the poor . . . the poor would benefit far more quickly and substantially."⁵⁸

Sider doesn't only generalize about rich Americans, he also specifically calls out rich Christians and the ministers who preach to them. As an example, Sider includes the story of Robert Schuller, the prosperity gospel preacher who formerly presided over the showy Crystal Cathedral in Southern California. Sider quotes Schuller saying something truly offensive about how they chose to build the mega-campus in-

⁵⁷ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 34.

⁵⁸ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 37.

stead of helping the poor because God is equally interested in people aspiring to success as he is interested in people having their basic needs met.

From there, Sider explains over the course of several chapters how God feels about the materially poor and how Christians need to get in line with God's instructions. He says, "Most wealthy Christians have failed to seek God's perspective on the plight of our billion hungry neighbors—surely one of the most pressing issues of our time."⁵⁹ Referencing the early Church, Sider reminds his readers that the first Christ-followers "shared a common purse"⁶⁰ and had every material possession in common with one another. In his interaction with the Rich Ruler, Sider says, Jesus simply "invited him to join a community of sharing and love,"⁶¹ an invitation which the man rejected. Even though prosperity and wealth can be "good and desirable,"⁶² according to Sider, there are also many perils for the Christian who chooses to hold onto them.

In the final section of Sider's book, he calls for massive-scale implementation of his ideas. "Personal change is insufficient,"⁶³ he says before outlining bigger, structural strategies for entire church communities and even societies to implement. These strategies would bring rich nations into alignment with Biblical principles for justice and wealth distribution.

At face value, there seems to be nothing wrong with Sider's ideas. They are in line with Biblical principles and, if adopted, would radically change our society for

⁵⁹ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 39.

⁶⁰ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 75.

⁶¹ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 76.

⁶² Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 99.

⁶³ Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 181.

the better. However, Sider's book doesn't seem to be a gospel message. It is not good news; it is good advice. It treats people who are materially wealthy too simplistically and assumes that all they need is a new reminder to be more generous and just. The book talks about the perils of material wealth, but neglects to consider the materially wealthy as potentially spiritually impoverished, and therefore fertile ground for the gospel. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* uses a simple measuring system for wealth and poverty; it measures in materials and finances alone. This leads to an argument that assumes if Jesus is good news for the poor, he is bad news for the rich, who must radically change their behaviors and give up their wealth in order to come into line with God's ways.

Subtopic B: The Hole in Our Gospel

Richard Stearns offers a more nuanced corrective to Sider's law-based approach. In his book *The Hole In Our Gospel*, Stearns couches the question "What does God expect of us?" in the message of the gospel. Stearns begins his book with the good news, describing God's reconciling work in Jesus. But Stearns then proposes the idea that "the gospel means much more than the personal salvation of individuals. It means a *social revolution*."⁶⁴ He mentions that in the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's Kingdom to come and his will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven. As participants in God's Kingdom, Stearns says, Jesus' followers are instructed "not just

⁶⁴ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 20.

to proclaim the good news but to *be* the good news, here and now.”⁶⁵ Stearns is trying to help Christian readers see the difference between seeing the gospel as merely personal salvation for individuals and seeing the gospel as a redeeming force for whole communities. Importantly, he cites Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth, in which he quotes Isaiah’s prophecy about him being good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, etc. Stearns suggests that Jesus was communicating a much grander vision of the gospel than mere personal salvation. I include the entire following paragraph as a sample of Stearns’ main proposition:

Proclaiming the whole gospel, then, means much more than evangelism in the hopes that people will hear and respond to the good news of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. It also encompasses tangible compassion for the sick and the poor, as well as biblical justice, efforts to right the wrongs that are so prevalent in our world. God is concerned about the spiritual, physical, and social dimensions of our being. This *whole gospel* is truly good news for the poor, and it is the foundation for a social revolution that has the power to change the world. And if this was Jesus’ mission, it is also the mission of all who claim to follow Him. It is my mission, it is your mission, and it is the mission of the Church.⁶⁶

Stearns goes on to say that the hole in the American gospel is that we have omitted “God’s call upon our lives”⁶⁷ to serve the poor and so experience the broader fulfillment of God’s gospel purposes in the world.

While *The Hole in Our Gospel* begins with the good news about Jesus and does a good job of expanding the definition of the gospel to include holistic, communal reconciliation, Stearns fails to nuance the definitions of wealth and poverty. In a later chapter, he includes a lengthy description of the relative financial wealth of the

⁶⁵ Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, 20.

⁶⁶ Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, 22.

⁶⁷ Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, 24.

American church compared to that of other countries. Similar to Ronald Sider, Stearns then calls upon the American church to be more generous. He admonishes rich Christians, saying, “The bottom line is that the commitment American Christians, the wealthiest in all history, are making to the world is just about 2 percent of 2 percent—actually *about five ten-thousandths of our income*.”⁶⁸

Like Sider, Stearns concludes on a note suggesting that if the gospel is good news to the poor, it is bad news to the rich who do not behave according to God’s justice. From Stearns, we gain a more holistic definition of the gospel. But we still lack more nuanced definitions of wealth and poverty, and therefore we lack a gospel approach to reaching the rich.

Subtopic C: Measuring Wealth and Poverty Beyond Material Possessions

In *Chapter One* of this project, Bryant Myers’ book *Walking With the Poor* is cited, saying that “the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational,” and “the nature of poverty is fundamentally spiritual.”⁶⁹ Myers says that even the “non-poor” can be considered impoverished, although in non-financial terms: “The non-poor have a great deal in common with the poor from the biblical perspective... The non-poor suffer from the same kind of poverty as the poor. They too suffer from marred identity, but with a marring of a different kind.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, 217.

⁶⁹ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 142-3.

⁷⁰ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 145-6.

With the ideas in this sentence, we can begin to think about wealth and poverty beyond what can be measured in finances and material possessions. We can begin to see that anyone can be considered impoverished, even if they have material wealth. Myers centers his measurement of wealth and poverty in the abundance or lack of good relationships. “Understanding poverty as relationships that don’t work for the well-being of all of us is consistent with the biblical story,” he says. “The scope of sin affects every one of the five relationships that make up our lives: our relationship with ourselves, with our community, with those we call ‘other,’ with our environment, and with God.”⁷¹ When we measure wealth and poverty in terms of these relationships, we can begin to look beyond finances and materials. True, broken relationships can often lead to financial poverty. But for many people, they continue to have broken relationships while maintaining a high level of financial wealth. These people are poor too, according to Myers. They are relationally poor.

How can ministers best reach this kind of person? How can a relationally poor yet materially rich person hear and respond to the message of Jesus? “There can be no practice of transformational development that is Christian unless somewhere, in some form, people are hearing the good news of the gospel and being given a chance to respond.”⁷² In other words, if a rich person hears a sermon and only hears about how they need to be giving away their wealth before they can follow Jesus, they have not heard the gospel. They might respond to the command they’ve heard, but they will not have responded to the gospel itself. The gospel, being good news, must ad-

⁷¹ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 144.

⁷² Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 145.

dress the materially wealthy person in his or her relational or spiritual poverty. Addressing them in this way gives them the chance to be transformed by the gospel rather than motivated by the law.

Myers says, “Too often the gospel message is presented as a set of propositional statements.”⁷³ He then offers some principles on how to reach and evangelize people from all measurements of poverty. Since the gospel is good news, evangelism is “announcing something that has happened in the world about which everyone has the right to know.”⁷⁴ The central focus of the gospel, according to Myers, is the reconciliation of all broken relationships, most importantly the relationship between God and humanity. This central matter should be the focus of our evangelism. “If money is the focus,” says Myers, “then money is perceived to be the key to transformation.”⁷⁵ This statement is true whether we are evangelizing the materially poor or the materially wealthy. In the case of the materially poor, if we focus on money in our evangelism to them, then we will preach a prosperity gospel and insinuate that God is good news to them only insofar as he wants their finances restored. In the case of the materially wealthy, if we focus on money in our evangelism to them, then we will preach a law-based message and insinuate that God requires them to give up their wealth before they can truly follow him. In both cases, the focus is on the wrong thing. The focus of the gospel is relationship restoration! As the Apostle Paul notes:

⁷³ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 311.

⁷⁴ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 311.

⁷⁵ Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, 313.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.⁷⁶

Ministers of the gospel who preach the good news to the materially rich should explore this idea of relational poverty and the reconciliation that addresses it. Most people, no matter how rich, have experienced broken relationships. Because of sin, we all have experienced a broken relationship with God. Therefore, the gospel is good news to everyone because everyone is relationally in need of reconciliation.

Subtopic D: The “Coin Drop”

When a rich person realizes he is in desperate *spiritual* need of a Savior, he will begin to have compassion for people who have desperate *material* need. The coin must drop in his mind (“I am spiritually impoverished by sin!”) before he can be genuinely motivated to share his resources with those who are in material need. Timothy Keller offers a helpful primer on how to understand this relationship between gospel acceptance and motivation for social justice. In his book *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*, Keller hypothesizes that a person who fully comprehends and appropriates God’s unconditional grace through Jesus Christ—that is, anyone who receives the gospel—will necessarily do justice as an outflow of his or her received mercy. He writes, “The logic is clear. If a person has grasped the meaning of God’s grace in his heart, he will do justice . . . God’s grace should make you

⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

just.”⁷⁷ Keller connects the receiving of the gospel to the doing of justice and mercy. He mentions Micah 6:8, in which the prophet says, “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This verse could easily be communicated simply as a command, attempting to motivate the rich toward generosity. Sometimes it is used only as a reminder to people of what God requires of people with resources, namely that they do justice and seek mercy. Keller, however, parses the verse, thoroughly describing the Hebrew derivations of both justice (*mishpat*) and mercy (*chesed*), which reflect the character of God as much as they command his people to action. Keller describes the Biblical “quartet of the vulnerable” and makes the case that God has for many generations cared deeply about them while commanding his people to show them mercy and justice.⁷⁸ The remainder of the book flows from this Biblical foundation, each application for contemporary social justice fully couched in the Old and New Testament commands to join God’s work in showing justice and mercy to the vulnerable.

But these commands are grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is good news to all. Keller gives a gospel motivation, rather than a law motivation, for rich people to be generous. The motivation for a rich person to be generous is the realization of God’s generosity to him, that is, he first needed the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Keller explains that on the cross Jesus has shown the ultimate justice and mercy to those who are impoverished by sin. He ties the gospel to our own generosity, paraphrasing Isaiah 58 to say, “What is this permanent

⁷⁷ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2010), 93.

⁷⁸ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 4.

fasting? It is to work against injustice, to share food, clothing, and home with the hungry and the homeless. *That is the real proof that you believe your sins have been atoned for.*”⁷⁹

Having spent many pages laying the foundation for social justice—that it is an outflow of the mercy Jesus has shown to us all—Keller then shifts toward the explanation of how God’s people are called into such work in the real world. Citing John Perkins’ famous philosophy of ministry (relocation, re-neighboring, redistribution, and reweaving),⁸⁰ Keller challenges affluent Christians to consider shifting their entire lives towards intentional justice and mercy for the poor. Their first step is to recognize their own spiritual poverty and need for salvation, and their second step is to respond to their salvation by being generous to the materially poor.

Finally, Keller employs the vivid motif of “reweaving the fabric of shalom”⁸¹ in human societies that have been torn apart by sin. His challenge is as clear as it is profound: “The only way to reweave and strengthen the fabric is by weaving *yourself* into it.”⁸² With this illustration, Keller combines Richard Stearns’ and Bryant Myers’ ideas of a holistic gospel and relational reconciliation. If the gospel is actually received and responded to, then all measurements of poverty, whether material/financial or relational/spiritual, will be addressed within communities.

Keller’s *Generous Justice* also helps us find the missing link between all of the Biblical calls to justice, and a gospel motivation for answering those calls. It

⁷⁹ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 96, emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 117.

⁸¹ Keller, *Generous Justice*, 173.

⁸² Keller, *Generous Justice*, 177.

helps us understand materially wealthy people as spiritually impoverished because of sin, and therefore allows us to see that Jesus as *good news to the poor* does not mean he is simply *bad news to the rich*. Keller's argument saturates the law in the gospel. Personally, I have discovered that the more deeply I understand God's mercy for a sinner like me, the more I am compelled to show mercy to the people around me. Jesus came a great distance to lay down his life for me, and I am thus inspired to go to great lengths to live sacrificially for others.

Generous Justice serves the church well by helping us see more nuanced measurements of wealth and poverty and by giving the wealthy a better motivation for generosity.

Subtopic E: Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich

There is another way to think about this. So far we have developed the idea that a Christian's true motivation for generosity is the grace God has already shown us in Christ. Another motivation for generosity is the *future grace* that will be given when Christ returns and ushers in his eternal Kingdom. Helen Rhee's *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* offers an eschatological view of wealth, poverty, and the formation of the early Church. In the book, Rhee focuses on Luke, asserting, "It is the Lukan Gospel that places a particular concern and favor on the poor, on the one hand, and a strong disapproval on the rich and their wealth, on the other."⁸³ Rhee is probably off-base in her claim that Luke emphasizes a "strong disapproval" of rich *people*,

⁸³ Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 34.

but she rightly reveals Luke's interest in helping his readers see the dangers of wealth. Rhee later does examine the different ways Luke defines wealth and poverty, and she rejects the notion that "material poverty is necessary for salvation" and that material wealth causes "exclusion from the kingdom."⁸⁴ Diving deeply into the history of Christianity, Rhee describes the various ways that the Christian community has understood its calling in regards to material wealth, care for the poor, and social justice. She returns in the end to eschatology, reminding the reader of the early Church's expectation of the coming Kingdom, when all earthly matters would be reset by the reign of Christ. Those first Christians lived in expectation of the imminent return of Jesus, "when God's perfect love, justice, and abundant life will reign."⁸⁵ Rhee's conclusion is that the contemporary church also ought to live in expectation of the coming Kingdom. Rhee writes:

Just as early Christians consciously constructed their self-definition(s) using wealth, responding to poverty, and understanding the responsibilities of the rich and poor in the light of God's creative purpose, Christians today are inescapably called to and have been forming and reforming Christian identity in relation to our attitude, use, and distribution of wealth and dealing with poverty for the common good, individually and corporately.⁸⁶

Rhee calls on Christians today to live generously "until Christ comes again,"⁸⁷ with as much eager expectation as the early believers.

Whether Christians live in view of past grace or future promise, they can frame their stories and identity within the larger story of God's redeeming grace.

⁸⁴ Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 90.

⁸⁵ Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 219.

⁸⁶ Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 219.

⁸⁷ Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 220.

Subtopic F: The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything

This chapter has reviewed several authors' proposals on the topics of preaching, the Gospel, and spiritual poverty amidst material wealth, while also reviewing some books on how to teach godly behaviors to the materially wealthy. We have seen that some authors, such as Ronald Sider, have written about wealth, poverty, and how rich people should be doing more for social justice. Other authors have written about spiritual poverty amidst material wealth. Bryant's book helps us understand how to measure poverty in its various forms; Stearn's book helps us see a more holistic gospel; and Keller's and Rhee's books help ground the need for social justice and generosity in the larger narrative of the gospel. There seems to be no published books about understanding rich people as potentially spiritually impoverished beings who are firstly in need of the gospel and secondarily in need of doing more for using their wealth for social justice. One book, however, is devoted entirely to the topic of *preaching* the gospel to the materially wealthy.

William H. Willimon's *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, published in 1978, offers a precise contrivance to approach the materially rich with the gospel first and the law second. This book was enormously helpful to me and challenged me (in a good way) to rethink certain aspects of the basic supposition of this thesis-project. Willimon challenges the idea that rich people simply need to acknowledge their weaknesses before accepting what Jesus is offering them. Even this, Willimon suggests, is akin to moralistic preaching. It presupposes that a person must repent before he can receive grace. "Merely pointing to people's sins and get-

ting them to feel sorry for those sins will not eradicate those sins.”⁸⁸ Willimon says preaching about repentance first makes the basic error of all moralistic preaching because it begins with human action instead of divine action.

To illustrate this, Willimon describes the typical Christian conversion testimony, which often includes too much focus on the sinner rather than on the Savior. He offers a better way to testify: “My inevitably halfhearted acceptance of Christ [should always be] overshadowed by God’s prior, wholehearted acceptance of me.” Willimon has trouble with the typical testimony because it really works best only for the down-and-outs.

How would a wealthy, secure person who has converted to Christ give testimony? While it seems far more compelling to stand and say, “I was lost and now I’m found” than to say, “I was doing perfectly fine until I met Jesus,” this is often the story of materially wealthy converts. People who are “strong” (as Willimon refers to them) can’t tell their conversion stories with the theme of “misery first—salvation afterward.”⁸⁹ These are people who “seem to be saying to us through their absence in our churches and through their lack of interest in our faith, ‘If that is all there is to Christianity, then I can get along without it.’”⁹⁰

Rich people may actually be spiritually impoverished, but they do not yet know that truth, nor are they immediately capable of perceiving it. Their material

⁸⁸ William H. Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 20.

⁸⁹ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 13.

⁹⁰ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 13.

wealth may not be leading to a sense of contentment, which might confuse them, but they are not yet ready to see the root cause of their confusion. Willimon asserts:

Many rich people will always feel destitute because they can never get enough money to be satisfied. A materialistic, consumptive society such as ours will invariably be an impoverished society, always getting but never getting enough, losing as much as it gains, destroying all the time when it thinks it is building.⁹¹

Willimon's statement is similar to Bryant Myers' work, which talks of the particular poverty of the rich being as a marred identity. Willimon concludes, "The poverty of the poor is tragic; so is the peculiar poverty of the rich."⁹² Gospel sermons, therefore, must expose this unrealized poverty. However, Willimon convincingly demonstrates that gospel sermons to the rich should have a different way of getting at it. They should not *begin* with the message that rich people are actually poor, weak, or miserable. This kind of message is not the gospel of Jesus but rather yet more bad news for the rich.

Willimon says, "Most of our sermons begin with an analysis of the human condition. That condition is conceived of as a problem, and a wretched problem at that."⁹³ For the person who has everything sitting in the pew, this message will likely sound foreign and confusing. Willimon suggests that the basic outline for sermons to the rich should change from:

1. You have a problem
2. Christ is the answer
3. Repent and be saved⁹⁴

⁹¹ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 57.

⁹² Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 57.

⁹³ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 18.

⁹⁴ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 17.

To:

1. Christ is the answer
2. You have a problem
3. Repent and be saved⁹⁵

In the second outline, the sermon begins with grace! Willimon says,

Now we begin with Christ, with the love which we have been loved. We begin with what God has done, not what we may or may not do. We begin reflecting upon God's 'Yes' to us before we think about whether we are to say no or yes to God. For us, Christ becomes the answer that stands, not at the end of all our self-ish desires and fearful questions, but the answer that stands before we even knew or dared to ask the most important of life's questions.⁹⁶

These words challenge one of the basic premises of this thesis-project because they offer a way of presenting the gospel to the rich that does not firstly require them to recognize their own spiritual poverty. Instead, the rich need first to become grateful for the gifts God has given them, including salvation, and *then* respond with an awareness of their need and a desire for repentance. "We must take seriously the fact that power, strength, maturity, self-discipline, and freedom [of the rich] are not *hindrances* to living the Christian faith but are *gifts* to be used gratefully and sacrificially."⁹⁷

If a preacher begins his or her message to rich people by saying, "Just admit it, you're actually spiritually poor," he or she runs the risk of engaging in moralistic preaching, according to Willimon. It is not good news for the poor, and it is yet more bad news for the rich! This kind of message does not begin with grace, but with the need for repentance, which places the impetus of salvation on the individual rather

⁹⁵ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 29.

⁹⁶ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 29.

⁹⁷ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 55.

than on God. The message of the gospel should be all about God's work in history and how our lives fit into that story. The rich person sitting in the pew needs to hear about God's gracious generosity first if they are to hear the gospel at all. What should the preacher say to a person who has everything? The preacher should re-frame the person's self-perceived strengths and blessings in the context of God's great gift-giving work. A preacher should "give the freedom to use those strengths for something greater than one's own selfish desires."⁹⁸ Once the rich person sees how generous God has been toward them, they can begin to see how stingy they have been with their own resources. Grace precedes repentance.

Learning from Willimon's book, we see that preaching to the rich does, in fact, require exposing the hidden poverties in their lives. But to be real gospel preaching, the message should not begin with a demand that people admit their own lack. A real gospel sermon to a materially wealthy congregation would reveal the great generosity of God in Christ, and then expose the depravity of the sinners in the pews while calling them to repentance and a grateful, generous response to God's generosity to them.

Subtopic G: The Identity of the Preacher in a Wealthy Congregation

Every congregation is a unique subculture within its larger cultural context and geographical region. In light of this, preachers must understand "local theology," in which "exegesis of the congregation and its subcultures is not peripheral to proc-

⁹⁸ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 58.

lamation, but central to its concerns,”⁹⁹ according to Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. In her book *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Tisdale describes the “culture shock” that many pastors experience upon receiving a call from a church and entering its subculture. Tisdale says this happens for nearly all preachers, especially those who have backgrounds that are dissimilar to the congregation to which they are called. From this wisdom, we can deduce that congregations comprised mostly of materially wealthy parishioners will present a culture shock to pastors who do not come from a materially wealthy background. Any pastor entering a congregation of material wealth needs to think critically about his or her role in the congregation.

Borrowing from an article¹⁰⁰ by Walter Brueggemann, Tisdale recommends that pastors who are trying to navigate their role within their congregation’s subculture need to adopt an insider/outsider identity. Brueggemann says there are three voices speaking during any sermon: that of the Biblical text, that of the preacher, and that of the congregation itself. “All too often, pastors team up with texts to ‘triangle’ against their congregations [while] preaching, leaving the congregation a hostile, resistant outsider who is understandably angry to be excluded from the triangle.”¹⁰¹ Brueggemann offers the solution: it is far better for a pastor to “stand with the congregation against the text, letting the radical Word of God offend both!” Only a pastor who the congregation considers an insider can accomplish this. As insiders, pastors “become acculturated into the idiom and life of a particular local congregation

⁹⁹ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, *Fortress Resources for Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 48.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “The Preacher, Text, and People,” *Theology Today* 47 (October, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 50-51.

and its subculture.”¹⁰² They speak from within the group as one of the group. They must be insiders.

Pastors must also simultaneously be outsiders to their congregations. As an outsider, the pastor is someone “whose acting and speaking also reflect worldviews and values that are different from those held by members”¹⁰³ of the congregation. With a different viewpoint, the preacher will be able to point out things that the members of the congregation are unable to see on their own. This is required if the congregation is ever going to experience a “new and hopeful vision for their future.”¹⁰⁴

A preacher who embodies both insider and outsider status, then, has “one foot firmly planted in the congregation, and one foot firmly planted in a larger Gospel vision.”¹⁰⁵ Tisdale suggests that this reality creates a sometimes-uncomfortable stance for the preacher, who “straddles the abyss—striving to love and affirm the congregation, while, at the same time, prodding and stretching it toward a larger worldview and great faithfulness to its own gospel.”¹⁰⁶

“Out of such awkward grace,” Tisdale vividly describes, “transformative proclamation is given birth.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 50.

¹⁰³ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 53.

Table 7. Preacher as Insider and Outsider

Preacher as “Insider”	Preacher as “Outsider”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preacher becomes personally immersed in the interior life of the congregation—its idioms, customs, and history. • Allows the preacher great opportunity for identification with the congregation in proclamation. • Affords the preacher the right both to celebrate the best of the congregational culture, and the right to criticize its weaknesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the ability to perceive things taking place in the local culture that long-term locals may not see. • Is able to provide categories through which those within and those without the congregation can deepen their understanding of the congregation and its subcultures. • Is more acutely aware of those significant junctures in congregational life at which a transformative gospel word needs to be spoken. • Has the freedom and imperative to speak hard truths.

A pastor of a materially wealthy church, in most cases, is not as materially wealthy as his or her congregation, thus it is usually easy to be considered an outsider. It takes more intentionality for the pastor to be perceived as a contextual/cultural insider. *Chapter Five* offers several practical contextualization strategies for pastors.

Pastors who are both insiders and outsiders will be able to proclaim what Tisdale calls “local theology” to their congregations effectively. They will offer gospel proclamation that is “not only faithful to Scripture, but that is also fitting, seriously imaginable, and transformative for the congregation.”¹⁰⁸ This requires a careful exegesis of the congregation and a constant learning of its stories, values, language and customs.

¹⁰⁸ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 127.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, there are different ways of thinking about preaching to materially wealthy people. To preach the gospel, preachers need to seek to understand spiritual and relational poverty amidst material wealth. Some preachers attempt to motivate their congregations to use their wealth for social justice instead of viewing their people as spiritual beings in need of the good news first. Preachers need to exegete their congregations and preach to the specific poverties they possess.

The following chapter describes a cultural exegesis of Stanwich Congregational Church.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN AND RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

The basic question of this thesis-project is:

- If Jesus was motivated by the Spirit to proclaim good news (the gospel) *to the poor*,
- And if preachers now are called to do the same,
- Then how can preachers proclaim the gospel to people who are materially and financially wealthy?

Chapter Two grounds the question in theological and Biblical concepts, and *Chapter Three* reviews literature on related topics. This chapter lists the results of three methods of research that placed the Biblical and theological concepts, along with the main question of the project, into conversation with contemporary wealthy Christians. The three methods of research were:

1. A broad survey of 125 people.
2. A 35-person group participation class I led at Stanwich Congregational Church in Greenwich, CT.
3. In-depth interviews with one person who is significantly wealthy and one person who is very poor.

Goals of the Research

The initial supposition of this thesis-project was that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for people who can perceive their own poverty, whether that poverty is measured in spiritual/relational or material/financial terms, or both. The project explores this supposition in order to better understand Gospel preaching and its ability to expose the various kinds of poverty in the hearers' lives, and reveal the Savior who

brings good news to each kind. The research focuses on gospel communication to the wealthy, seeking to understand wealthy people as listeners and as spiritual beings. It does not primarily focus on how wealthy Christians should be using their wealth for good; it does not ask the question “Does material wealth impede spiritual growth?” and it does not attempt to figure out systemic causes of material poverty or seek strategies for the church’s involvement in addressing them. The main thrust is to view the financially wealthy as potentially spiritually or relationally impoverished people who hear the “good news for the poor” and believe that they can be counted among those for whom the news is intended.

The goals of the research, then, are:

1. To understand wealthy people as spiritual beings, *and*
2. To explore the possibility of relational and spiritual poverty amidst material wealth, *in order to*
3. Inform preaching strategies for ministers in wealthy congregations.

Research Results “Snapshots”

Exhaustive results of the three research methods are included in the appendixes. The following paragraphs of this chapter offer anecdotal examples, or snapshots, that depict some of the main themes discovered in the research as a whole.

Snapshot 1: Driving from Bridgeport to Greenwich

During the 35-participant class at Stanwich Church, adults interacted with Biblical and theological themes and gave their responses to the whole group. Most of the participants were residents of Greenwich, but a small group of men traveled to the class from their residential men’s ministry in Bridgeport, CT, about thirty minutes

away from Greenwich. Bridgeport, unlike Greenwich, is one of Connecticut's poorest communities.¹ The men in this ministry are in recovery from substance addiction, career devastation, and relational brokenness. They are typically materially impoverished when they arrive at the residence and are disciplined into spiritual abundance, while being equipped with career and life skills, over the course of their involvement in the program.

One participant described his view from the van that drove them from Bridgeport to Greenwich for the class. He said,

I drive here with [the men's recovery ministry] every Wednesday from the center of Bridgeport. From James Street, the side of the road has trash, buildings and factories condemned, homeless people. But there is life everywhere. You hear music, you hear laughter, and you hear voices. Constant movement. People running around in the street. Life everywhere. Lots of sin as well. But we drive to Greenwich in the van and I see it change – the atmosphere around us. Every time, no matter what happens, we pull in to this area and guys ooh and ahh at everything. There is this mansion with a seven-car garage and we are all oohing and ahing. Myself, in my youth, I lived in a trailer park in Jackson, IL. I still go wow every time I'm here – stunningly beautiful. But I don't see life in this neighborhood. I don't see people in their yards. In Bridgeport, yeah it's run-down. But there I see life, exuberance and people living. Here I just see houses. This is something I notice. I see houses that are beautiful, but I don't see the people.²

In this anecdote, the participant vividly illustrated relational abundance amidst material poverty in Bridgeport, and apparent relational poverty amidst material wealth in Greenwich. In Bridgeport, a broken economic system is depicted in sights of loose trash, condemned buildings, and homeless people on the streets. However, in the context of that material poverty, relationships abound through shared music,

¹ "Bridgeport, Connecticut," City-Data.com, accessed August 31, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Bridgeport-Connecticut.html>.

² Appendix D, Participant 3.

laughter, and “life everywhere” as people populate the streets. The participant kept looking out of his van window as they drove toward Greenwich, where the scene changed. He no longer saw condemned buildings; he noticed a seven-car garage and many mansions. He saw material wealth. Amidst this material wealth, however, he no longer saw smiling faces; in fact, he saw no people at all. Obviously, people live in the large homes of Greenwich, but to this observer from the van window, there was no sense of community on the streets like there was in Bridgeport. His observations from the van window point to the possibility that material wealth (and the large houses it affords) can consequently create obstacles against spontaneous community relationships.

Snapshot 2: A New Mom, Alone In Her Luxury

While the first snapshot gives a view from the exterior of houses in a wealthy neighborhood, this snapshot gives a view from the interior of one such home, offering a poignant example of how material wealth can sometimes be a direct cause of relational poverty. One research participant was a mother who lives in Greenwich and grew up on a military base during her own childhood. She attends a women’s Bible study in Greenwich designed for women with young children. Growing up on a military base, the woman remembered occasions when military wives welcomed new babies into their households on the base. Residents of the surrounding neighborhood would arrive, gifts and casseroles in-hand, to greet the baby and family. They would offer to help by fulfilling the new mother’s other obligations such as laundry and housework. But in Greenwich, there are few such practices when a woman has a ba-

by. The participant described a time when one of the women in her Greenwich Bible study had a newborn baby. In the group one week, the mom of the newborn broke down crying because she felt desperately alone since the new baby had come. Each morning, the mom of the newborn would awake to see the hired baby nurse taking care of her newborn. Another nanny was supervising the morning routine for the older children in the household, and a housecleaning staff was busy vacuuming and dusting the living rooms. The mom of the newborn had no role other than to rest, and none of the people assisting her were friends; they were all hired staff. The participant who grew up on a military base observed: “If [this woman] didn’t have money to hire all that staff, she would need us, her friends, to come over and help her. Growing up at [the military base], we didn’t have staff, but we had each other. We had a community.”

With this anecdote, we see how the relative material poverty of a military base can create avenues for community, while the material wealth of a place like Greenwich can create obstacles to it. A community of people surrounded the mother of the newborn baby, but the people were all paid to be there. As a result, she lacked the voluntary, spontaneous community comprised of authentic friendships. Her situation precisely illustrates the point Madeline Levine makes, as discussed in *Chapter Three* of this project: “Affluent women are the least likely of any socioeconomic group of unhappy women to seek help for their problems.”³ In this case, material wealth directly contributed to relational isolation. Feeling lonely and sad, the woman experi-

³ Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 205.

enced relational poverty amidst material wealth.

Snapshot 3: Money Reduces Relational Risk and Reward

During the in-depth interview with the financially poor woman, she gave insight into how having money can reduce relational risk, which can also reduce the reward that can sometimes come as a result. The woman, Mary (not her real name), was financially poor at the time of the interview, but had previously been a wealthy hedge fund employee. During her time of having wealth, she had an experience which she illustrated during the interview:

Mary: One of the girls that I mentor, I've known her since she was 12. She was starting this job. It was something where you have to make appointments with people and you try to sell them something. And so I knew whatever it was she was selling I wasn't going to buy. She was like, "If I make this appointment with you," she just called me because she knows that I love her, she's like, "If I make this appointment with three people, I'll make this much money. Can I make an appointment with you?" And I was like, "Well how much money will you make?" She says, "I'll make 50 or 60 dollars." And I'm like, "Can I just give you the money?" She was like, "I don't want the money!" And I was like, "I'm really busy can I just give you the money." Later on when the Lord showed me that. I was like, "God I'm so sorry."

Nathan: So here was somebody who you were mentoring. She just wanted to be with you. And you said, "How about money instead?"

Mary: She just wanted me to help her. She just wanted me to spend time with her. She was like, can I just practice the sales pitch on you?

Nathan: The money could make that risk go away.

Mary: The money made the risk go away and it didn't do anything to build the relationship.⁴

⁴ Appendix C.

In this anecdote, Mary points to a larger phenomenon that is only made possible with wealth. Wealthy people can reduce relational risk by simply giving money to people who need it. A more holistic view of wealth and poverty includes more measurements than money alone. In the case of Mary's mentee, the young girl needed both money and mentorship, which is inherently relational. But by offering to give her only money, thus solving the *financial* need, Mary neglected the *relational* need that was presented to her. When she did this, she reduced the relational risk but also lost the potential for the relational reward that comes from intergenerational mentorship. Once again, we learn that wealth carries with it the potential to create interpersonal disconnectedness. If preachers of wealthy congregations are looking for ways to identify various measurements of poverty in their congregation's lives, they can look at situations like the one Mary described.

Snapshot 4: My Wealthier Friends

During the in-depth interview with the materially wealthy man, he revealed something that relates to the prayer of Asaph in Psalm 73. Even though Asaph himself was a Levite and therefore likely materially wealthy and well positioned in the Temple hierarchies, he admitted in his prayer that he was keenly aware of the prosperity of his acquaintances. In the in-depth research interview, Richard (not his real name) revealed that his annual household income was around \$8 million, and that he has a net worth of around \$70-80 million. These figures place Richard in the finan-

cial top 0.1%—not the 1%, but the 0.1%—of all U.S. citizens.⁵ Even so, Richard was readily able to answer my question, “Approximately how many friends do you have that are wealthier than you are?” He replied, “If I had to count how many friends I have that have 100 million dollar plus net worth. Maybe 30-40 friends.” I then cited the Forbes list that includes eight known billionaire residents of Greenwich, CT.

Richard replied,

And I would just say those are the *known* billionaires. I know six or seven that are not on the Forbes list because of the businesses they are in that don’t report them. The list those are generated off of are generated off of people who have public assets like shares in companies or who have sold companies. But your typical hedge fund manager who doesn’t have to disclose to anybody what he or she is worth would never appear on a list like that. I know seven or eight billionaires in the town of Greenwich who don’t fall on that list.⁶

This anecdote was a surprise to me when I first heard Richard mention it. I also noted the fact that even though Richard is in the financial top .1% in the U.S., he was very aware of who in the local community is wealthier than he is. Like Asaph, Richard could list some of the characteristics of his more prosperous acquaintances. Unlike Asaph, Richard did not mention any personal envy of, or ill will toward, those people. This anecdote points to the reality that no matter what level of wealth people might attain, we can sometimes look horizontally (earthly), like Asaph did in his pre-sanctuary mindset, to notice the wealth of those around us.

⁵ Phil Izzo, "What Percent Are You?," *Wall Street Journal*, October 19, 2011, accessed August 31, 2016, <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2011/10/19/what-percent-are-you/>.

⁶ Appendix B.

Snapshot 5: A Christian vs. Atheist Perspective

Each respondent who took the broad survey was given the opportunity to write an open-ended comment at the end of the form. One man, who selected “Christian” as his religious identification, unwittingly wrote a response that was similar in format to Psalm 73:

When I compare myself to other people who live in Fairfield County and particularly Greenwich, I don't consider myself wealthy. I didn't graduate from an Ivy League University, I don't live in a prestigious part of Greenwich, I don't belong to a country club, I don't have a boat, I take care of my own yard and maintain most aspects of my home, but I did send my son to prep school for two years to improve his academics. We don't take lavish vacations to popular destinations in the USA or around the world, but I have been to many developing world countries when I was engaged in missions and outreach. I've experienced poverty in outreach in our inner cities, but more so in third world countries such as Guatemala, Haiti, Rwanda, Ghana and India. Every time I go to these places it provides me with perspective. I have a roof over my head, I eat 3 meals a day, I have access to free education, I have access to medicine, I have access to clean water to drink and bathe, I've been able to consistently earn a living as a [redacted] for 43 years and am currently retired comfortably. Yes, I am rich and as a follower of Christ, I need to leverage my resources to advance the Kingdom of God . . . So even though I'm retired, I've been convicted by the many passages of scripture that challenge me to partner with God in redeeming the world. . . . No matter what our economic status, he wants to use our time, talent, and treasures to heal a broken world and to bring glory to Him, the author and creator of life.⁷

The respondent began by comparing himself to others, just like Asaph did. Then, in the middle of his statement, the man gained a new perspective. Traveling on mission trips reminded him of his real treasure, measurable in both material provision and in his relationship with God. Like Asaph, he concluded his statement with a desire to bring glory to God. The pattern is the same as Psalm 73 in that it began with a

⁷ Appendix E.

horizontal perspective, which changed midway through to reveal a new perspective in which God is cherished and praised above all earthly treasures.

Another person who took the survey selected “Atheist” as her religious identification. As part of her open-ended response, she wrote, “All that I have in the world, I have because of my own actions. My happiness is my own and my sadness is my own. The only person who has the capacity to change me is myself.”

While the sample size is obviously very low—she was the only Atheist who took the survey—I learned a lot from her statement. “The only person who has the capacity to change me,” she declared, “is myself.” This is a statement in obvious contradiction to the gospel, which presumes that personal spiritual change must come from outside one’s self. Change comes when a person yields his or her will to God’s will and allows God’s pursuing love to change them. According to the Bible, change does not come through the individual’s inner enlightenment, but from divine intervention. For example, Zacchaeus did not climb the tree and gain enlightenment through meditation; Jesus entered his home and showed him unconditional love. Similarly, Asaph’s entrance into the sanctuary was not merely some field trip to a museum; it was an encounter with the saving God of the Universe. Both men were changed by God’s interference, not by self-generated illumination. By contrast, in an atheistic worldview, there is no possibility for divine intervention. One is left to his or her own devices.

If we place the Atheist participant’s statement next to the Christian participant’s statement, we see a sharp contrast:

Table 8. Atheist vs. Christian Perspectives

Self-identified Atheist	Self-identified Christian
“The only person who has the capacity to change me is myself.” ⁸	“[God] wants to use [my] time, talent and treasures to heal a broken world and to bring glory to Him, the author and creator of life.” ⁹

Whereas the Atheist relies upon only herself as the impetus for change, the Christian relies upon something outside himself, namely, God’s desires for how he would spend his time and resources. Whereas the atheist expresses no awareness of the world and its needs (at least in this brief statement), the Christian is driven by a divinely inspired compassion for healing the broken things in the world. One is totally and completely self-focused and self-reliant; the other is totally and completely other-focused and God-reliant.

Relatedly, during the 35-participant class, we were discussing Jesus’ command not to be anxious, which he gave during his Sermon on the Mount. One participant’s takeaway was,

I think it falls under ‘being our own God.’ If we think we know everything—we have all the answers—we are never going to get there. Letting go and just accepting Jesus as our Savior and God is it. If you think you have all that knowledge than you get stuck. I don’t think he’s talking about money – but maybe your own pride and own knowledge.¹⁰

These statements from research participants reveal that Christian belief has a real impact on one’s perspective. People who believe Biblical truth, who have experienced God’s presence, actually think and behave differently than Atheists. They

⁸ Appendix E.

⁹ Appendix E.

¹⁰ Appendix D, Participant 12.

tend to look outside themselves (to God) for spiritual and behavioral change.

Snapshot 6: Preaching To Keep Them Comfortable In Their Pews

During the interview with the wealthy man, he and I discussed various passages in which the Bible challenges wealthy believers to act generously and justly with their wealth and influence. We read Luke 12:13-21, in which Jesus tells the parable of the “rich fool.” In the parable, a man plans to tear down his storehouses to build bigger ones so that he can store his wealth and relax. Jesus challenges the man, saying, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”¹¹ This seemed to Richard like an obvious challenge against having too much material wealth. The passage concludes with Jesus saying, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”¹² When I concluded the reading of these verses, Richard responded,

I think you laid emphasis in the part of the reading where I want to hear. So every time I hear it... I’ve heard it, I can’t count how many times. I hear the end that ‘you are not rich toward God.’ That’s what I *want to hear*.

My deepest crisis of faith happens when I believe I am rationalizing my belief system to accommodate my reality. And it happens most around money and material possessions. So when I hear that parable I hear the first 80 percent of it as damning to my situation. And I hear the last sentence as hope. As the sort of inspiration or the path towards righteousness. I really don’t think about money and righteousness. I think about money and relationship with God. I think about that last sentence as sort of the path to the deeper relationship I’m looking for with God. But I can’t get out of my mind the first portions of the parable, which to me feel quite damning towards accumulation and stuff. The biggest reaction always comes at the end which is, I have a sigh of relief that I hear that last line and I immediately have a feeling of semi-anxiety that I am rationalizing. I am using the last line of Jesus’s words to rationalize the very

¹¹ Luke 12:20.

¹² Luke 12:21.

clear and spoken text he's given us before then which seem to be almost a slamming of building stuff.¹³

I appreciated Richard revealing his "deepest crisis of faith" here. He said his crisis is "When I believe I am rationalizing my belief system to accommodate my reality." Is it possible that preaching can *contribute* to this deep crisis of faith? According to Richard, the answer is yes. Later in the interview, he said,

From the vantage point of a congregant; a perspective that I know is shared with other members of the congregation because I've heard it, [is that] Pastor Nathan gets up and he is going to talk about wealth and how wealth and closeness to God is not necessarily incompatible. And the conclusion is, here is an accommodating pastor of a really wealthy church who is finding a way to rationalize and not challenge his congregation because he's got to keep people in the pews.¹⁴

To this, I replied, "So are you saying you would rather hear challenges on this?" He then said,

I come to church and I sit in the pews to hear from you what you spend your life and your mindshare dwelling in the word of God. I want you to give to me what you believe is the essence of the word of God in my life. Good, bad, indifferent, hard, easy. I want the salvation message, I want the challenge message. But I may not be your representative congregant. So I want you to be aware that I think a lot of people that come to a church like this, you know. I am not sure a lot of people are coming to be challenged in the pews. As a result of that, if you were to get up and preach that 'everything you've heard about the eye of the needle is sort of nuanced and here are the nuances about it.' The challenge that you have is to a spiritually rich few is that you are accommodating this setting because you have to. That I think is something that I think you can't deny as a challenge. That's how I see it. The first question you asked, 'has a pastor or preacher ever made you feel guilty about money' and the answer is decidedly yes. I'd be shocked if my experience is unique. I think the challenge for you is to reverse that mainstream American Christian teaching. It's super hard.¹⁵

¹³ Appendix B.

¹⁴ Appendix B.

¹⁵ Appendix B.

There is a lot to learn from this dialogue. Basically, from Richard's perspective, my preaching can sometimes seem light on the Biblical challenges to those with wealth and heavy on the nuances. In the interview, Richard essentially asks me to preach more on the Biblical challenges to the wealthy because, as he indicated in the other part of the interview, his "deepest crisis of faith" is that he is justifying an aspect of his life that he suspects may not be godly. What he needs from the pulpit is a solution for his faith crisis, but instead he is hearing something that may resemble his own inner voice, which tells him what he wants to hear instead of what he needs to hear.

Long after my interview with Richard, I dwelled on these comments. I examined several of my recent sermons, listening with new ears in light of Richard's described experience. The last thing I want to do as a preacher is *contribute* to someone's deepest crisis of faith! If Richard is representative of other spiritually mature, materially wealthy listeners, I need to shift my preaching strategies to help, not perpetuate, their faith crises. In order to do so, according to this feedback from Richard, I will need to preach more often on some of the Biblical expectations for the wealthy.

Snapshot 7: Comparing Perspectives of the Rich and the Poor

Complete survey results from all 125 participants are included in the Appendix. Here, I cull the richest (defined by those whose household income is \$413,350 or more) and the poorest (defined by those whose household income is \$18,500 or less) and compare the two groups' perspectives on select questions from the survey. The survey's categories for household income were based on the 2016 U.S. tax bracket

levels.¹⁶ By comparing the two groups' answers to the survey questions, we can gain insights into the effects of wealth and poverty on people's spiritual perspectives.

All numerical averages are based on a five-point scale. Participants were given this selection scale for each question:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree

When faced with the statement, "There is at least one person in my life who loves me unconditionally," the poor and the rich answered nearly the same way, with the rich having a slightly higher response:

There is at least one person in my life who loves me unconditionally.

The Poor:	The Rich:
4.8	4.9

I asked this question because I was trying to understand if there are universal impediments to relational wealth related to financial poverty and wealth. The survey results showed me that no matter one's financial household income, most people have at least one person who loves them unconditionally.

Belief in *God's* unconditional love differed slightly. Answering the statement, "I believe God loves me unconditionally," the rich were more likely to answer higher:

I believe that God loves me unconditionally:

The Poor:	The Rich:
4.25	4.9

¹⁶ "2016 Tax Brackets," Tax Foundation, October 14, 2015, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://taxfoundation.org/article/2016-tax-brackets>.

These results were interesting to me, especially when compared with the nearly equal way the participants answered the previous question. The people who took my survey who are financially wealthier were also more likely to believe that God loves them unconditionally. This leads me to surmise that some people's sense of God's *love* is tied to his *material provision* for them.

The poor were far more likely to respond higher to the statement "I find myself daydreaming about having more money":

I find myself daydreaming about having more money:

The Poor:	The Rich:
3.75	2.3

This was an unsurprising result. It makes sense that poor people would more often daydream about having more money than they currently have. However, in asking the question, I was hypothesizing that the numbers would be similar. In other words, I wondered if, no matter one's level of wealth, people daydream about having more money. It turns out that some people daydream less about having more when they do in fact have more.

In a similar theme, the rich were more likely to answer higher on the question, "There is nothing on earth I desire more than God."

There is nothing on earth I desire more than God.

The Poor:	The Rich:
3	4.23

In asking this question, I wondered if the rich would find themselves equally as desirous of earthly possessions as the poor. The results were somewhat ambigu-

ous, although the poor were more likely to express having a desire for things on earth that trump their desire for God. I surmise that this desire is simply for having more material provision. The rich, who already enjoy such provision, might have the luxury of thinking about the true value of God in their lives.

The rich were more likely to answer higher on the question, “Aside from my money or possessions, I feel poor in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally.”

Aside from my money or possessions, I feel poor in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally.

The Poor:	The Rich:
1.75	2.1

While the difference is not vast, I find these results to be related to the central question of this thesis-project. According to this research, people with material wealth are more likely to feel relationally or spiritually poor, even if only by a small margin. This data could relate to the realities described in *Snapshot 1* and *Snapshot 2*, in which relational isolation is present amidst material wealth.

The rich and the poor answered nearly identically on the question, “Aside from my money or possessions, I feel rich in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally.”

Aside from my money or possessions, I feel rich in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally

The Poor:	The Rich:
4.8	4.7

By comparing these results to the previous question’s results, I learned that materially rich people are more likely to feel relationally or spiritually poorer than

their socioeconomic opposites, and poor people are more likely to feel relationally or spiritually wealthier than their socioeconomic opposites. In other words, a rich person is more likely to feel relationally poor than a poor person is to feel relationally rich.

The rich were more likely to feel that God is with them wherever they go:

I sense that God is with me wherever I go.

The Poor:	The Rich:
3.5	4.6

These results are similar to the question, “I believe that God loves me unconditionally.” Like that question, in which wealth seemed to correlate to a sense of God’s love for the person, this one indicates a correlation between having wealth and feeling God’s presence.

Snapshot 8: Freedom and Stewardship

Wealthy people who can see their own need for a Savior can truly receive what the gospel offers. When they receive Jesus’ good news for the poor as their own, they experience freedom from all the ways that material wealth can entrap people, and as a result they can become godly stewards of their earthly treasure.

The first step is freedom. During the 35-participant class in which we read several Bible passages and reflected on them, one young woman offered this observation:

[What stood out to me was] the self-importance and the self-centeredness of the rich young man who came to Christ. It was ‘I, I, I.’ And the rich man who stored everything for himself, speaking to his soul, every thing was very much self-centered. I came to think [that] the freedom we need is perhaps the

freedom from our own self. And it's not whether we have money or not; that's not the ultimate issue . . . It's how we spend it—whether we have money or how we spend it—how free we are from ourselves. And only Christ by grace can set us free from ourselves. Being free from our selves means being poor in our spirit—Lord have mercy on us. We are sinners. Acknowledgement of that and realizing that we are human beings with physical needs . . . that's really hard. We are very needy beings. Our goal is to be only satisfied in God—we also look to him for provision and knowing all that we need.¹⁷

This is a profound insight into the Scriptures. Throughout this project, I have focused on Jesus' words in Luke 4 that he is good news to the poor. But he also said in the same moment that he is freedom for the captives. Beyond offering freedom to people behind literal bars, perhaps the captivity to self-centeredness is another prison from which Jesus can free people. As it relates to money, people are totally self-centered if they obsess over their material wealth or poverty. They are self-centered if they believe the illusion of self-sufficiency, which often accompanies financial success. Focusing on Jesus, true treasure that he is, brings people out of themselves and centers them on their Savior. Asaph concluded his prayer by looking vertically into his treasure in heaven, thus taking his eyes off of his own self. In this way, all Christ-followers can be set free from the self-absorption caused by focusing on money if they turn their gaze toward heaven.

The second step, true stewardship, results from the freedom that comes from the first step. Another participant in the class said,

If I had to give this part a title, I would call it stewarding your treasure. I really like how [Jesus] is just so comforting to not fear, be anxious, or worry. That's all throughout scripture: Do not be afraid. He tells us how valued we are above all that he created. We are heirs of the world . . . But come alongside him and co-create to help steward the things in the world. I watched a baby chick being born this afternoon. He worked so hard and then he laid there.

¹⁷ Appendix D, Participant 15.

You see God's miracle in action. He's caring for this chick and he got out of this egg. ... This is a more complex life the more we have because it's more we need to steward. But I do feel he has equipped us for that challenge. But letting our hearts go of those things and fill them with him. And he will show us how to steward those things with him.¹⁸

This participant painted a helpful picture of a materially wealthy person who knows that his or her earthly treasure is a gift of God's grace. She had witnessed a tiny chick cracking open its egg, then resting in exhaustion. The chick's life and breath were gifts from its Creator! It is the same with humans. All that we have comes from God. When a materially wealthy person sees this truth, she can become a steward of her earthly belongings. After considering the newborn chick, the participant said, "This is a more complex life the more we have because it's more we need to steward. But I do feel he has equipped us for that challenge."

The materially wealthy person who has received the gospel is freed from the entrapments caused by wealth and becomes a true steward of God's provision.

Snapshot 9: Losing Money and Finding True Treasure in God

The financially poor woman I interviewed, Mary, told me the story of how she lost her hedge fund job and entered into poverty. At the time of our interview, it had been four years since she was employed, and she had been living on the provision and the kindness of friends, along with small amounts of income from her graphic design work, for that entire time. Why hadn't she sought to become financially wealthy again? Because in her poverty she finds a more valuable treasure than robust finances. She said,

¹⁸ Appendix D, Participant 13.

When I had tons of money. I had lots of money but an emptiness. I did a few things to try to fill that place. But because I had money I had options. I was traveling, I was giving to causes I really believed in. Helping people that I just wanted to help. All those things. But nothing filled that place on the inside. The more money I made the more I longed. I remember the first year that I had this really great bonus sitting at my desk, and I remember thinking, “I can’t live like this.” And I said, “Okay this is what I’m going to do. I’m going to take my lunch break. I’m not going to eat lunch. I will just grab food and eat lunch at my desk. I’m just going to take my lunch break, go sit in my car and pray for the whole hour.” Because I have got to have more of you [God] in my heart. My heart felt dry. Like I really needed water. And in my mind grew up all through college knowing this was what I was working for and all of these years of being poor thinking, “This is it! I’m gonna finally get it!” And finally getting it, my heart being at a place of – it wasn’t despair, but it was great longing. I used the money for great things and it felt great for a while. But it didn’t last. It’s so funny because when I was leaving the hedge fund, I said in January, I want to be out of here in June. I didn’t think God took it seriously and then when June came, my boss was like, “Yeah this isn’t working out.” I was so happy! The woman who did my exit interview was like, “Why are you smiling?” I said, “I don’t know!” I was so happy! She was like, “Don’t rub it in!” I can’t even explain it. I’m telling you, that time when I had all of that money, and when I was on unemployment, I really dove head first into God. You are really what I’ve wanted. All those shiny things I’ve had before, yeah I don’t have those. But I want you. You are it. So I took that time in every day. I came to the church every day. I don’t know, I think I did this for a month. And just all day, prayed. Some days I fasted. Just prayed and worshiped. Every day I would say, tell me who you are. And then he answered me with this one thing, he gave me the scripture about Mary of Bethany and how she came and she sat at his feet. The oil she poured on his feet was worth a year’s wages. He said, “I want you to give me a year.” And in my mind, I was like “you can have ten years! If I get you, you can have it all.”¹⁹

In this story, Mary said two very interesting statements. She said, “the more money I had the more I longed,” and, “If I get you [God], you can have it all.” In the first statement, Mary reveals something inherent in wealth accumulation: one rarely feels as though he or she has enough. There is always a longing for more, even when

¹⁹ Appendix C.

more is being accumulated. In this way, earthly treasure will never truly satisfy the underlying poverty of spirit that all humans have.

Mary also said that once she had received her real treasure, namely God, she was utterly satisfied in him alone. Out of the overflow of this contentment, Mary experienced a strong desire to give herself to God. In other words, the response to *receiving* true treasure is *giving away* what one once held dear. When people experience the richness of God's generous grace, they spontaneously become generous in response.

Snapshot 10: "In the Sanctuary of God"

Survey respondents answered the question about church attendance in a variety of ways. Selections ranged from "Rarely" to "Every Week or More," with three variances in between. I was curious to find out how church attendance related to responses from another field on the survey, namely the statement, "There is nothing on earth I desire more than God." The statement, which respondents answered on a scale of 1-5, is worded almost exactly like Asaph's articulation of his post-sanctuary spiritual condition in Psalm 73:25:

- ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
And **there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.**
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.²⁰

²⁰ Emphasis mine.

Asaph had begun the psalm by confessing he was “envious of the arrogant when [he] saw the prosperity of the wicked.”²¹ By concluding his prayer stating that there was *nothing* on earth he desired more than God, he displayed a complete change of heart. He went from envy of others to contentment in God alone. This change happened, as we have discussed in previous chapters, “in the sanctuary of God.”²²

In my research, I was interested in discovering whether Asaph’s change of heart was unique or common. Is there a more universal phenomenon of people entering the sanctuary and finding contentment in God alone? To find the answer, I separated the survey respondents by church attendance regularity and compared their answers to the statement reflecting Psalm 73:25. For church attendance, I took those who answered “Rarely” or “1-3 Times A Year” (categorized as *Rarely in the Sanctuary* below) and those who answered “Every Week or More” (categorized as *Frequently in the Sanctuary* below). I then compared these two groups with one another on their responses to the statement, “There is nothing on earth I desire more than God.”

Table 9. “There is nothing on earth I desire more than God.”

Rarely in the Sanctuary	Frequently in the Sanctuary
2.75	4.3

These results reveal that frequent attendance in worship has a high correlation to finding satisfaction in God above all earthly things. For those who attend church every week or more, the average answer was 86 percent agree (4.3 out of 5). For

²¹ Psalm 73:3.

²² Psalm 73:17.

those who attend church rarely, the average answer was 55 percent agree (2.75 out of 5), meaning that people who regularly attend church are 31 percent more likely to find their satisfaction in God instead of any earthly thing.

Chapter Five explores the theological and practical implications of these results.

Conclusion

The ten snapshots herein are representative of the overall research results. The first two snapshots reveal the possibility of relational and spiritual poverty amidst material wealth. The third snapshot shows how having money can reduce both relational risk and relational reward. The fourth one reveals that Asaph's awareness of the material abundance of his acquaintances is a common trait amongst most people. The fifth snapshot displays the difference between Atheistic and Christian perspectives on matters of self-change and life mission. The sixth snapshot exposes a possible problem in gospel preaching to the wealthy, namely if a gospel preacher accommodates the wealthy by not challenging them on matters of generosity and justice, the preacher might be contributing to people's faith crises. The seventh snapshot compares wealthy people's perspectives with poor people's perspectives, revealing some key contrasts in the way they view God's love and presence in their lives. Generally speaking, materially rich people more often feel relationally poor in their human relationships even while feeling that God loves them and is always with them. The eighth snapshot shows how a person can experience the richness of relationship with God even while losing financial prosperity. The ninth snapshot offered the idea that

by focusing on God as one's best treasure, a person can be freed from the self-absorption caused by focusing on material wealth or poverty. Lastly, the tenth snapshot reveals a correlation between worshiping God in the sanctuary and finding contentment in him alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction: Summary of the Project and Research Findings

Chapter One lays the foundation for the overall project by asking the initial question, defining the relevant terms, setting parameters, and describing the cultural setting in which the question was asked and the research was conducted. The question, terms, and parameters all center on Jesus' declaration that he is "good news to the poor." This declaration is placed in tension with the realities of material wealth among some Christians. The basic question is: If Jesus was motivated by the Spirit to proclaim good news (the gospel) to the poor, and if preachers now are called to do the same, then how can preachers proclaim the gospel to people who are materially and financially wealthy?

Chapter Two establishes Biblical and theological foundations, beginning with the question under the initial question: If the gospel is good news to the poor, is it *bad news* to the rich? The chapter traces the Biblical theme of God requiring wealthy people to use their money and influence for generosity and justice and examines the different ways wealth and poverty are measured throughout the Biblical narrative. The chapter also explores related themes in the Gospel of Luke, especially focusing on the Rich Ruler and his encounter with Jesus. *Chapter Two* concludes with an exegesis of Psalm 73 to establish the idea that people's perspectives about money can radically change "in the sanctuary of God."

Chapter Three demonstrates several things. First, it demonstrates that gospel preaching reveals Christ, brings glory to God, calls people to obedience as it inspires generosity and justice, and impacts people's destinies. Second, it demonstrates that the gospel is not legalism; therefore, as it relates to the present topic, gospel preaching does not firstly command wealthy people to change their behavior or their relationship with their money. Instead, real gospel preaching announces good news to the poor. Third, the chapter demonstrates some of the profound relational and spiritual poverties that can exist in the lives of materially wealthy people. These findings allow for the possibility of thinking of materially wealthy people as spiritually impoverished beings for whom "good news to the poor" is applicable. Fourth, the chapter demonstrates several different ways that people have attempted to communicate to wealthy Christians, some of them legalistic, some of them grace-motivated, and others a blend of the two approaches. Finally, the chapter begins to explore the identity of the preacher attempting to preach the gospel to materially wealthy congregations.

Chapter Four offers ten snapshots that represent the overall findings of the research. The snapshots exhibit two evidences of relational and spiritual poverty amidst material wealth; two examples of present-day similarities with Asaph's ancient spiritual condition; a surprising challenge from one materially wealthy person who exposed a potential error in gospel preaching to the rich; various contrasts between the perspectives of rich and poor; a look at freedom and stewardship as fruit of the gospel; and a final correlation to Asaph's impact from being in the sanctuary of God.

This final chapter presents three preaching-related big ideas that emerged from the Biblical inquiry, literature review, and results of the research. One idea relates to the preacher, one to the message, and one to hearers of the message. Specifically, the effective preacher to a materially wealthy congregation is simultaneously a cultural insider and outsider; the effective message of the preacher communicates God's gospel before it communicates God's law; and receptive hearers of the gospel will eventually see their own unique measurement of poverty as they accept the good news to the poor.

All three of these ideas center on preaching, therefore all three of them have the potential of occurring *in the sanctuary of God*. Before we unpack the three ideas, let us first dwell on this phrase, "in the sanctuary of God." Doing so will help us realize the relationship between the congregation's material wealth and the craft of preaching. According to the biblical example, and confirmed in the research of this project, the sanctuary is a chamber in which our perspectives on wealth can change dramatically. Asaph realized God's unsurpassed worth in the sanctuary; likewise, the people who took this project's survey who regularly visit the sanctuary are 31% more likely to find their satisfaction in God instead of any earthly thing.¹

The implication is clear: Preachers and worship leaders today are stewards of the sanctuary and can leverage this holy chamber in order to help people encounter God, who can radically change people's perspectives.

To understand this implication, preachers and worship leaders can look into Asaph's sanctuary to see what he may have experienced there. What did Asaph expe-

¹ See *Chapter Four*.

rience in the sanctuary? Martyn Lloyd-Jones reminds us that the “Shekinah glory of God was present”² there. Commentary-writer J. McCann suggests that Asaph may have experienced “a priestly oracle of salvation, some sort of festal presentation, a Levitical sermon, or some kind of mystical experience.”³ We know from the biblical record that Asaph would have also witnessed an altar upon which a lamb was sacrificed. Christian sanctuaries today have all of these basic ingredients as well, though one of them takes a different form. Yes, we can ask for God’s presence in the sanctuary. Yes, we can deliver oracles of salvation. And yes, in the cross and on the Communion table, there are visual reminders of the Lamb who was Slain, Jesus Christ. If Christian sanctuaries today contain the ingredients of true worship, then people can experience the same transformation that Asaph experienced. Three ingredients connect our present-day sanctuaries to the sanctuary of the Temple, namely, God’s presence, oracles of salvation, and the altar. As a result, the very same prayer that Asaph prayed can be our prayer as well. Our congregations can leave the sanctuary saying:

Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.⁴

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 47.

³ J. Clinton McCann, *The New Interpreter's Bible: 1 & 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

⁴ Psalm 73:23-26.

How does a pastor of a wealthy congregation, as a steward of the sanctuary, create an atmosphere like the one Asaph entered? The results of this project reveal that there are two strategies for the preacher and one resulting impact on the congregation. They comprise the three big ideas of this chapter: The effective preacher is a cultural insider and outsider; the effective message communicates God's gospel before it communicates God's law; and receptive hearers of the gospel will eventually see their own unique measurement of poverty as they accept the good news to the poor.

Big Idea 1: The Effective Preacher to a Materially Wealthy Congregation Is Simultaneously a Cultural Insider and Outsider

In the summer of 2002, I worked as a seminary intern in New York City for an organization called the New York Fellowship. The organization had multiple ministry platforms, including sports chaplaincy for the Yankees, boardroom Bible studies for Wall Street men, and various other outreaches, including a little league baseball program in East Harlem. On one particular day, I learned (by mistake) the value of cultural contextualization for effective ministry. It was one of my first days on the job, and I remember it well. At noon, I walked off the elevator on the forty-something floor of a shiny skyscraper in the Financial District to help run a boardroom Bible study for some executives on lunch break. I was due in East Harlem at 2:30 p.m. to assist the little league coaches on the baseball diamonds amidst some housing projects. I arrived in the boardroom with my white dress shirt accidentally un-tucked beneath my blue blazer. (I am horrified of this memory now). Rightly, the

executive in charge of that particular meeting pulled me aside and sternly told me to tuck it in. When the Bible study had concluded, without changing my clothes, I walked to the subway station and rode the train northbound to East Harlem, which is one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. I exited the subway stairs into a neighborhood very different than the Financial District. I stopped by a corner bodega to buy a Gatorade before heading to the housing projects' baseball diamonds. The man behind the counter saw me enter his store, with my crisp white dress shirt (all tucked in now), blue blazer, and shiny dress shoes. He began shouting and cursing at me, calling me "The Man," and strongly urging me to depart his store immediately.

In one day, I managed to offend both of the cultures in which I had hoped to do gospel ministry. In the executive's boardroom, I displayed my unpreparedness; in East Harlem, I was perceived as a symbol of oppression. In both situations, I presented myself as an obvious *outsider*, and as a result, I forfeited my gospel voice.

What did I learn from these experiences and how do they apply to preachers who are called to materially wealthy congregations? I learned that the effective preacher to a materially wealthy congregation is simultaneously a cultural insider and outsider.

The Literature Review section of this project includes an insight from Leonora Tubbs-Tisdale, who said that pastors must "become acculturated into the idiom and life of a particular local congregation and its subculture"⁵ in order to be perceived as a trusted voice within the congregation.

⁵ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, *Fortress Resources for Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 50.

This principle is accompanied by one spiritual implication and three practical implications for preachers to wealthy congregations. The spiritual implication is a caution against enchantment. The preacher who enjoys an insider status in a wealthy context has the potential of becoming enchanted by the trappings of wealth. For wisdom about this potentiality, we can look again to Asaph, whose prayer applies not just to the congregation, but to the pastor as well. After all, Asaph was a worship leader for his own congregation. His lesson provides valuable insights for ministry leaders throughout time. Asaph expressed his enchantment with the prosperity of some of his acquaintances. “I was *envious* of the arrogant when I saw [their] prosperity,”⁶ he said. In this verse, Asaph revealed that he despised the wickedly prosperous, but he also admitted that his heart was enchanted by their undeserved blessings. When he entered the sanctuary and encountered his true treasure once again, he looked back on the trappings of prosperity and was able to say, “There is nothing on earth I desire besides [God].”⁷ Like Asaph, pastors of wealthy congregations need to focus on God's worth and remember that their true treasure is in heaven in order to guard their hearts against the spiritual hazard of wealth's enchantment.

There are also practical implications for the pastor of a wealthy congregation if he or she is going to be considered a cultural insider. The pastor must overcome the reality that most congregants naturally view their ministers as outsiders. For example, in the in-depth interview with the wealthy man, he talked about how “the people in the pews” may or may not feel about my preaching, and he suspected that I

⁶ Psalm 73:3, emphasis mine.

⁷ Psalm 73:25.

sometimes “accommodate this setting”⁸ because I need to keep those people in the pews happy. These phrases indicate to me that Richard thinks of the person in the pulpit as separate from the people in the pews. He does not view his pastor as a true insider in the culture to which he and the others belong.

In order to overcome the perception of being an outsider, an effective pastor to a wealthy congregation will employ three practical strategies. First, the pastor will listen to and observe the cultural nuances that are practiced and valued in the culture. Second, the pastor will dress, talk, and (in some ways) act like the people in the community. Third, the pastor will gain access to the cultural institutions to which the people belong. The second two will be possible in a limited capacity unless the pastor is also materially wealthy.

The first step is listening and observing. When I was first called to Stanwich Church, I introduced something I called “Hart to Hearts.” Hart to Hearts were 45-minute sessions, held in my office or wherever was convenient for the parishioners, during which I asked the same three questions to every person. I asked, “Tell me your story; Tell me what you love about this church; and Tell me one thing you would change about this church if you could.” In the first three months of my tenure at Stanwich, one hundred and ten people attended a Hart to Heart with me. During each session, I listened to and observed the nuances and values of the church’s culture. By observing their patterns of behavior, appearance, and parlance, I was able to analyze my own patterns for possible contradictions that would make me seem like an outsider.

⁸ Appendix B.

Having observed the congregation's cultural patterns, the effective preacher will appropriate as many of them as possible into his or her own behaviors and colloquialisms. This is the second step. The pastor will dress, talk, and (in some ways) act like the people in the community. Except where any of them directly violate God's laws, the preacher in a materially wealthy context should participate in the activities of the people in the community. Joining these activities will place the pastor in relational proximity to the people in the mission field beyond the actual ministry programming of the church and add credibility to his or her witness.

The third step is to seek creative ways to gain membership in clubs, schools, and other institutions within the church's context. This may be hard to do if the activities or clubs have high prices of admission, but the pastor who moves among these institutions will lower the perceived barrier between those inside the institutions and themselves. A pastor might, on principle, be opposed to belonging to such institutions. In reality, refusing to belong will only hinder access to the mission field to which the pastor has been called.

In summary, in order to become trusted, and therefore heard, a pastor in a materially wealthy context needs to guard against the spiritual temptations of becoming enchanted or embittered by the wealth around him or her. Practically, he or she needs to listen to and observe cultural behaviors, appropriate them when possible, and seek membership within the culture's institutions. As an insider, the preacher can stand with the congregation and effectively ask, "What is the Bible teaching people like us?" But if the preacher is *only* an insider, he or she will be unable to speak in cate-

gories beyond the limitations of the particular culture. The effective preacher to a materially wealthy congregation is also an outsider.

Tubbs-Tisdale writes that the preacher as cultural outsider is someone “whose acting and speaking also reflect worldviews and values that are different from those held by members”⁹ of the congregation. This difference in perspective, combined with the preacher’s influence in the life of the congregation, can help the congregation move toward a “new and hopeful vision for their future.”¹⁰ A cultural outsider is not totally ensconced in all of the affinities and sin patterns of a materially wealthy culture. As a result, he or she can help people take a step back to see a broader perspective of themselves, others, and God.

Like the first principle, this principle is also accompanied by a spiritual implication. Just as the preacher with an insider status has the potential of becoming *enchanted* by wealthy people, the preacher with an outsider status has the potential of becoming *embittered*. Again we can draw from Asaph’s prayer for wisdom. He expressed envy of the prosperous, but he also expressed bitterness toward them. He described even the way they walk and talk in disgusting terms. The reader can feel his resentment when reading the first half of the psalm. After his sanctuary experience, he confessed that his soul was “embittered” and he was “pricked in heart.”¹¹ Some pastors of wealthy congregations fall into this devastating trap and allow bitterness to poison their hearts, making themselves useless for the gospel.

⁹ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 50.

¹⁰ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 52.

¹¹ Psalm 73:21.

Pastors of wealthy congregations who can avoid bitterness will be effective outsiders who can speak prophetically into the lives of the congregation. The congregation will learn to value the pastor who is an unbiased outsider.

In the in-depth interview with Richard, when he talked about me in outsider terms, he did not necessarily disparage my position in the community. He seemed to see the value in my outsider perspective. He said,

I come to church and I sit in the pews to hear from you what you spend your life and your mindshare dwelling in the word of God. I want you to give to me what you believe is the essence of the word of God in my life. Good, bad, indifferent, hard, easy. I want the salvation message, I want the challenge message.¹²

Richard sees his pastor as someone who spends his “life and mindshare” differently than he does. His desire to hear from his pastor seems to be based on a relationship of trust. He trusts that his pastor, who lives differently than he does, has a message for him that is beneficial for his own life and faith. In this trusting relationship between hearer and preacher, the preacher as outsider is able to speak effectively into the lives of the congregation. If the preacher as insider asks, “What is the Bible teaching *us*?” the preacher as outsider asks, “What is the Bible teaching *you*?”

The preacher as outsider can also draw from different personal experiences to illustrate Biblical truths. For example, during sermons at Stanwich Church, I sometimes use illustrations from my own childhood experiences in Holland, MI, which is a culture quite unlike the culture of Greenwich, CT. At other times, I use illustrations from my young adult experiences on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, which is a culture that is very close to home to the Greenwich folks. The way I talk about the

¹² Appendix B.

two different locations and the cultural phenomena therein allows the congregation to see categories that are broader than the ones seen in Greenwich alone.

Effective preachers to wealthy congregations will draw from their own lives and cultural contexts in order to help listeners see beyond the social and theological categories of their local community.

For preachers, the success of both the insider and the outsider relationship is built on trust. The congregation will trust the pastor who does not fall into either spiritual pitfall of enchantment or embitterment. On the one hand, if the preacher is too much of an insider, he or she could become enchanted by wealthy culture, saying in his or her heart, "I want to be like these people." On the other hand, if the preacher is too much an outsider, he or she could become embittered, saying "I hate these people." Either temptation will be disastrous for the preacher and will forfeit his or her trust and ministry influence in the community.

The preacher as a trusted insider/outsider will succeed in "striving to love and affirm the congregation, while, at the same time, prodding and stretching it toward a larger worldview and great faithfulness to its own gospel."¹³ The effective preacher to a wealthy congregation is simultaneously a cultural insider and outsider.

Big Idea 2: The Effective Message of the Preacher Communicates God's Gospel Before it Communicates God's Law

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, heavenly angels appeared to lowly shepherds and announced the birth of the Messiah. Some years later, when Jesus miracu-

¹³ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 53.

lously rose from the tomb, he appeared to his dear friend Mary. The reaction in both cases was the same: the shepherds and Mary spontaneously and immediately went and told others what they had seen. I like to imagine Christmas night from the perspective of the shepherds. I imagine their widened eyes as they beheld the glory in the heavens above them, their wildly beating hearts as they ran toward the village to find the child, and their overwhelming emotions as they looked that child in the face. I also like to imagine Mary's experience with Jesus outside the tomb. She was so bewildered that she didn't even recognize him until he called her by name. What wonder was flooding her mind as she ran from that place toward the room in which the disciples sat, still grieving the loss of their Lord? Both the shepherds and Mary witnessed world-changing events. What was their response? They ran and they told. They announced the good news—the gospel—to anyone with ears to hear it.

Gospel preachers today can learn from the shepherds and Mary. No matter who our hearers are, we have a message of first importance: Jesus Christ came into the world and conquered death. These are the events that the gospel announces. The early church grew with the widespread heralding of the events of God's presence and grace. As the church formed, they began to live out the moral implications of the good news. They sought to understand God's law in light of God's grace. Today, *evangelistic* preaching to materially wealthy people announces the good news of God's gospel, and *discipleship* preaching to the materially wealthy communicates the moral implications of the good news.

The foundation of this entire project is the supposition that materially wealthy people must understand their own spiritual poverty in order to accept the fact that the

“good news to the poor” is for them. However, William Willimon’s *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything* confronts the idea that materially wealthy people need first to reach some kind of new self-understanding before they can receive the gospel. *Chapter Three* includes the following paragraph:

Willimon challenges the idea that rich people simply need to acknowledge their weaknesses before accepting what Jesus is offering them. Even this, Willimon suggests, is akin to moralistic preaching. It presupposes that a person must repent before he can receive grace. ‘Merely pointing to people’s sins and getting them to feel sorry for those sins will not eradicate those sins.’¹⁴ Willimon says preaching about repentance first makes the basic error of all moralistic preaching because it begins with human action instead of divine action.¹⁵

This revelation from Willimon changed one of the presuppositions of this project and helped refine its conclusions about preaching to the rich. It also brought the conclusions into line with Michael Horton’s theological correction about what the gospel is and isn’t. People, no matter their level of wealth or socioeconomic status, need to hear *good news* if they are to hear the gospel at all. If preachers insist on convincing people of their spiritual poverty as a necessary first step in following Jesus, they preach moralism, not good news. If preachers insist on people being more generous with their wealth, they preach moralism, not good news. If preachers insist on people fighting for justice in an unjust economic system, they preach moralism, not good news.

Gospel preaching does not first insist that *people* be generous, it announces the fact that *God* has been, and continues to be, generous. “For God so loved the

¹⁴ William H. Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁵ See Chapter Three of this project.

world that he *gave . . .*”¹⁶ Focusing on God’s generosity first is a way to effectively preach the gospel to the materially wealthy.

The survey respondents answered an average of 2.3 out of 5 to the statement, “When I hear most preachers talk about money, I get nervous.” This was a lower number than expected by the premises of this project. In a similar survey conducted in 1993 with a larger sample size, 43 percent of respondents said “churches are too eager to get your time and money,” and 36 percent said “it annoys me when churches are too eager to get your time and money.”¹⁷ This level of frustration with preachers’ messaging about money is likely due to the fact that many people hear moralistic messages about wealth instead of gospel messages about wealth.

When a wealthy person who has not yet fully submitted his will to God enters a church and hears moralistic admonitions about wealth, he will likely reject what he has heard. Few people enjoy being scolded about misusing their own money. Indeed, the wealthy community’s rejection of the Occupy Wall Street message is a natural reaction to such scolding. Preachers can learn from this. Evangelistic preaching firstly proclaims the good news about God’s generosity. Once a person sees how generous God is, the person might then be ready to acknowledge his or her own selfishness.

This is precisely what Timothy Keller communicates in *Generous Justice* when he says, “The logic is clear. If a person has grasped the meaning of God’s

¹⁶ John 3:16.

¹⁷ Robert Wuthnow, “Pious Materialism: How Americans View Faith and Money,” *The Christian Century*, March 3, 1993, accessed September 26, 2016, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=238>.

grace in his heart, he will do justice . . . God's grace should make you just."¹⁸ The first half of this statement is key. *If a person has grasped the meaning of God's grace.* Materially wealthy people will never grasp the meaning of God's grace if all they hear is moralistic messaging about their money. The law is only temporarily powerful to motivate people to change. The gospel liberates people from guilt and condemnation. The gospel liberates people from the lie that they are their own saviors. The gospel liberates people from the spiritual captivity that can accompany material wealth. The gospel, if heard, believed, and lived, is the only message that can actually open the spiritual eyes of the materially wealthy so that they can perceive their own poverty. Only after saying, "How generous God has been with me!" can a person be rightly motivated to be generous to others. Effective evangelistic preaching to the materially wealthy firstly communicates God's gospel to them. But once they have grasped the meaning of God's grace, then they must be educated on the moral implications of the gospel as it relates to their money and influence.

Wealthy Christians eventually need to hear that there is more to the message of the Bible than simply the fact that Jesus died and rose again. Once they have received and believed the gospel, they can begin to live a life of stewardship and faithful obedience to God's law. As Richard Stearns admonishes in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, and Richard Sider in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, God cares deeply about how wealthy people spend their money and exert their influence. God wants rich people to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our]

¹⁸ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2010), 93.

God.”¹⁹ God wants rich and powerful people to protect the quartet of the vulnerable, not to “oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor.”²⁰ God, by his grace, is generous to the rich, and as a result he calls them to become generous to the materially poor people of the world.

Zacchaeus, who received God’s generosity when Jesus gave him relational love, responded with generous justice. “Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’”²¹

In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul offers Biblical insight into this relationship between the gospel and its implications. “⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”²²

These three verses encapsulate the idea that the effective message of the preacher communicates God’s gospel before it communicates God’s law. Fact 1: We have been saved by grace, not by our good works. Fact 2: We have been created as a good work of God. Fact 3: God has prepared good works for us to walk in. An effective preacher to the materially wealthy will communicate all of this, not just part of it.

¹⁹ Micah 6:8.

²⁰ Zechariah 7:7.

²¹ Luke 19:8.

²² Ephesians 2:8-10.

Perhaps these three facts would serve as an even better sermon outline than William Willimon's suggestion.²³

In the in-depth interview, Richard articulated his need to hear both the gospel *and* the law. "When I sit in the pews to hear from you," he said, "I want the salvation message, I want the challenge message."²⁴ Richard has been a Christian for many years. He has heard the gospel. He believes the gospel. And he needs help—as all of us do—with living in light of the gospel. Even though Richard needs to hear the salvation message often, he also needs to hear the moral implications of the fact that he has been saved.

In fact, he told me that his "deepest crisis of faith" is "when [he] believes [he is] rationalizing [his] belief system to accommodate [his] reality."²⁵ Gospel preaching alone will not fully address a crisis of faith like this. Richard also needs to hear God's law so that he can better understand the "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [he] should walk in them."²⁶

If Richard's pastor *only* communicated the gospel and never the law, Richard would walk out of the sanctuary every week with his faith crisis unresolved. Wealthy disciples of Jesus need both the salvation message and the challenge message if they are ever going to reconcile their spiritual and material lives.

²³ See *Chapter Three*.

²⁴ See Appendix B.

²⁵ See Appendix B.

²⁶ Ephesians 2:10.

During the group class at church, Participant 2 connected the gospel to its implications when he was discussing the freedom from worry that God can give to people. He said,

God is an amazing spender. . . . This amazing universe that God lavished on us. And the word lavish is from Ephesians 1:8—I love this word. It defines how God loves us. ‘That he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure.’ God is a lavisher. If we will only take on that characteristic and fall into step with him and his heavenly purposes.²⁷

After relishing the generosity of God, the participant concluded with an invitation to join God in his generous mission. He said, “If we will only take on that characteristic and fall into step with him and his heavenly purposes.” This man, who is materially wealthy, is no longer a beginner in the faith; he is now a disciple. He has heard the gospel loudly and clearly, and he has appropriated it into his life. He is ready to “fall into step” with God’s generous character and become more generous himself. As God stewards all of Creation, so this man stewards the things that God has given him.

One day, during the writing of this chapter, several months after the class was conducted, I picked up the phone to call Participant 2. I reminded him of what he had said during the class, and I asked him, “Tell me. If you wandered into a church years ago, before you were a Christian, and you heard a preacher say, ‘You should be more generous,’ how would you have responded?”

He replied, “There would have been no response in my heart. It would not have motivated me. It would just be a moralism disconnected from the source.” In

²⁷ Appendix C.

his pre-Christian life, the wealthy man would have had “no response” to a preacher’s command to be more generous. Yet, as a Christian, he marveled at God’s generosity and felt compelled to join God’s mission of lavishing love and resources upon the world around him.

Effective preachers to materially wealthy congregations will investigate whether the majority of their congregation needs evangelistic or discipleship preaching. If the congregation does not yet know the gospel, then the preacher will deliver messages about the goodness of God’s lavish love, his grace, and his saving work through Jesus Christ. If the congregation already knows and believes these truths, then the preacher will deliver messages about how God calls them into the good works of generosity and justice that he has prepared for them.

The effective message of the preacher communicates God’s gospel before it communicates God’s law.

Big Idea 3: Receptive Hearers of the Gospel Will Eventually See Their Own Unique Measurement of Poverty as They Accept the Good News to the Poor

I grew up with a spiritual condition much like the Rich Ruler’s. When I was young, I didn’t truly view Jesus as my savior. I viewed Jesus as a good teacher who could help refine my impeccable righteousness. If you were to ask me during my college years if I was keeping God’s laws, I might have replied, “All these I have kept from my youth.” I could point you to my position of spiritual leadership on the campus, the many spring break mission trips I attended and led, and my nearly perfect attendance in chapel. Like the Rich Ruler, I had a huge spiritual blind spot. I was

totally unaware of the fact that in my heart I was arrogant and self-righteous. Later, in my mid-twenties, God began exposing my blind spot and revealing my spiritual poverty to me. It happened during the engagement period and first years of being married to my wife, Nancy. My new bride was displaying the effects of being in a relationship with such a self-righteous man. One day, my older brother Paul pulled me aside and said, “Nathan, when I first met Nancy, she was like a blooming flower. Now, I look at her, and she is more like a wilting flower.” Then he paused for a moment before delivering the real kicker. He said, “She is wilting under your judgment.”

In that moment, God shined a bright light into my blind spot and opened my eyes to see it. I can honestly say that I had not fully realized my need for a savior until that moment. I had grown up *rich* in obedience, but *poor* in grace. Even though I had heard the gospel all my life, I wasn’t ready to receive it until I saw my unique measurement of poverty. After realizing my spiritual poverty and receiving God’s grace, I began a journey of treating my wife with grace instead of condemnation.

Receptive hearers of the gospel will eventually see their own unique measurement of poverty.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, as we see in *Chapter Two* of this project, the only people who respond positively to Jesus are the ones who have a posture of receiving. The children, whose youth is their poverty, receive his warm embrace. The blind beggar, who was physically blind and materially impoverished, received healing and restoration. Zacchaeus, whose poverty was his societal isolation, received Jesus

into his home and experienced salvation. They each had a posture of receiving, therefore they could accept what Jesus was offering them.

The Rich Ruler never displayed a posture of receiving during his encounter with Jesus. His example stands in contrast to the example of Zacchaeus. Even though both men were materially wealthy and both were successful in their careers, only one of them received Jesus. The other pushed him away. What made the difference? Only Zacchaeus understood that the gospel was something to receive, not achieve. Only Zacchaeus saw his own measurement of poverty and was able to receive what Jesus could supply.

When Jesus exposed the Rich Ruler's spiritual poverty—"one thing you still *lack*"²⁸—he turned away sadly. His posture was arrogance, not receptivity. He thought the Kingdom was something to be earned, which is why he asked, "What must *I do* to inherit eternal life?"²⁹ A man who believes he can earn the Kingdom will not understand what Jesus is offering him. What Jesus offers is the free gift of his grace, unearned and undeserved. Children and blind beggars can readily understand this, but those who are materially wealthy and self-righteous may take longer to have their eyes opened to their need for a savior. To the blind beggar, his need was painfully apparent to him, day after day. He most likely never wandered into the myth of self-sufficiency. With his palms opened toward heaven, sitting by the side of the road all day, he was literally in a posture of receiving! But the Rich Ruler, and the prosperous acquaintances of Asaph in Psalm 73, strutted through the earth with

²⁸ Luke 18:22.

²⁹ Luke 18:18.

pride as their necklace. The contrast between these two postures—begging and strutting—is extreme. The beggar needs a savior; the ruler needs only himself.

In the 35-participant class, Participant 12 said,

I think it falls under Being Our Own God. If we think we know everything—we have all the answers—we are never going to get there. Letting go, and just accepting Jesus as our Savior and God, is it. If you think you have all that knowledge then you get stuck. I don't think the real issue is about money, but maybe your own pride and own knowledge.³⁰

This is a profound insight. Being our own god is the real issue and the main obstacle to receiving Jesus. Sometimes the earning of material wealth can create the illusion that we are self-sufficient, but the money itself is not the core issue, as this participant so wisely stated. In her spiritual journey, she eventually arrived at this understanding and was able to fully receive Jesus as her “Savior and God.” The Rich Ruler was his own savior, at least on the day he encountered Jesus. It is possible that he later came to realize his need for a savior. Some scholars have postulated that the Rich Ruler was a young Saul of Tarsus, who later became known as the Apostle Paul. Whether or not this is true, Paul’s journey is definitely one of a man eventually having a posture of receiving after years of being in a posture of earning. His “eventually” came after the living, risen Christ met him on the road to Damascus. In his conversion, he went from “reason for confidence”³¹ in his own achievements to viewing those achievements as “rubbish”³² compared to the glory of Christ.

People who are materially wealthy, and especially people who are wealthy *and* self-righteous, will need to go through a similar conversion if they are ever to tru-

³⁰ Appendix C.

³¹ Philippians 3:4.

³² Philippians 3:8.

ly receive Jesus. They will need to view their own self-sufficiencies as rubbish in order to value the glory of God. They will need to view themselves as impoverished beings in order to accept the fact that God's good news to the poor is applicable to them.

Wealthy hearers of the gospel can accept the fact that good news to the poor is applicable to them.

Let us consider the example of Paul's testimony in Philippians 3 in closer detail as we think about how materially rich people can, by God's grace, view themselves as spiritually impoverished beings. Paul wrote,

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.³³

In his post-conversion life, Paul looked back on his self-sufficiencies and compared them to what he had gained in knowing Christ. It's as if he stacked all of his accomplishments in a large pile, and instead of thinking, "What a fine resume I have!", he valued their worth to be equivalent to garbage. This is a man who understood his own poverty, though he was rich. This is a man who went from strutting through the earth with pride as his necklace to opening the palms of his hands and stretching them toward heaven.

In the survey results, the one atheist respondent said, "All that I have in the world, I have because of my own actions." This is the quintessence of self-

³³ Philippians 3:7-9a.

sufficiency and the opposite of receptivity to Christ. The atheist was honest about her sense of self-sufficiency, but many Christians, in the way they posture their hearts toward God, actually live by the same principle.

In order to hear the gospel as applicable to their lives, self-sufficient people eventually need to see themselves as people in need of salvation. Even if we take William Willimon's advice not to tell them their need right away, people eventually will need to come to realize the "surpassing worth"³⁴ of their savior and the lack of value of their human achievements, impressive as they may appear by worldly standards. Willimon's paradigm would have preachers talk about the provisions of wealth in terms of God's blessings in an effort to help wealthy people see God's existing grace in their lives. At some point later in their spiritual journey, Willimon would invite the people to consider their own sinfulness ("you have a problem"³⁵) and their need for a savior.

In my experience as a pastor, I have noticed that many people do not ultimately see their need for a savior until they encounter some kind of life crisis. People usually find the Savior when they reach the end of themselves. A painful divorce, a career crisis, or a death in the family—these are episodes in which people reach the end of themselves. Their self-sufficiencies, or their monetary provisions cannot solve the present problem, so they finally, personally reach for the Savior they've been hearing about from the pulpit. They finally find themselves in a posture of receiving, and the words of the gospel come ringing into their consciousness and they hear the

³⁴ Philippians 3:8.

³⁵ Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*, 92.

good news in a new light. They used to hear the good news for the poor and think of others less fortunate. Now they hear the good news for the poor and say in their hearts, “This news is for me.” Having arrived at this self-realization, a materially wealthy person can truly steward his or her wealth and influence, like Zacchaeus did after receiving salvation from Jesus. The believer sees material abundance as a gift of God’s grace, not something earned by self-sufficiency. All people are in equal need of God’s saving grace, even while some are in urgent need of material provision. The wealthy believer who sees his or her spiritual poverty will be ready and willing to be generous and just toward those in material need. When they are in a posture of receiving, wealthy hearers of the gospel can accept the fact that good news to the poor is applicable to them.

Analysis of Research Methods

This project utilized three research methods: a broad survey of 125 respondents, a group participation class of 35 people, and two in-depth interviews. The three big ideas described above emerged during the research and review phases, when the opening supposition encountered *one confirmation* of its premise and *two surprises*. The confirmation was that people do need to see their own unique measurement of poverty before accepting the fact that they need a savior.³⁶ The first surprise was that sometimes preachers contribute to the faith crises of disciplined wealthy Christians by

³⁶ See *Chapter Two*, especially the section on Luke’s gospel and its various measurements of poverty, wherein the only people who accept Jesus as savior are the ones who admit their need for him.

accommodating them on the spiritual issues related to material wealth.³⁷ The second surprise was that asking materially wealthy people to acknowledge their poverty has the potential of being moralistic preaching, not gospel preaching, and therefore should be considered discipleship, not evangelism.³⁸

Considering the first surprise, that sometimes preachers contribute to the faith crises of disciplined wealthy Christians by accommodating them on the spiritual issues related to material wealth, I realize in hindsight that I did not conduct enough research to explore how materially wealthy people have experienced preaching in the past. There was one question on the survey, “When I hear most ministers talk about money, I tend to get nervous,” and a few minutes on this topic during the in-depth interview, but more exploration is needed. How has preaching contributed in the past to misunderstandings about faith and material wealth? This and other questions could have been answered with related questions on the survey, class, and interview.

Considering the second surprise, that asking materially wealthy people to acknowledge their poverty has the potential of being moralistic preaching, not gospel preaching, I realize in hindsight that I could have tested this idea with my participants. I could have tried various methods of communication and measured their responses. For example, I could have played audio clips of various preachers’ messages and asked the participants to respond to what they heard. This would have helped

³⁷ See Appendix B and the conclusions from the in-depth interview in *Chapter Four* and *Chapter Five*.

³⁸ See *Chapter Three* and the discussions surrounding William Willimon’s book *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*.

me understand materially wealthy people as *hearers*, which was one of the goals in the opening chapter of the project.

The three research methods, biblical and theological foundations, and the literature reviewing, combined, were adequate in seeking to test the supposition and answer the question of the project. However, there could have been more (or different) methods to mine deeper material.

Future Research

The opening supposition for this project was that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for people who can perceive their own poverty, whether that poverty is measured in spiritual/relational or material/financial terms, *or both*, and that gospel preaching needs to help expose the various kinds of poverty in the hearers' lives to reveal the Savior who brings good news to each kind.

This thesis-project lacks thorough analysis of the "or both" category of people. What about people who are materially poor *and* relationally poor? How do they perceive and receive the gospel? What is their relationship with their money and possessions (or lack thereof), and how does that affect their view of Jesus who offers to bring them good news?

The project's supposition was tested only in the context of a congregation of people who have significant material wealth. There was an underlying assumption in the research that people who are materially poor have an easier time acknowledging their own sense of need and therefore may be more receptive to the good news of Jesus. In a limited way, this assumption was tested; there were a few materially poor

people in the 35-participant class, several who took the survey, and one, shorter, in-depth interview.

Future research could test this idea more thoroughly by presenting the supposition, scripture passages, and surveys to a congregation that is comprised mostly of materially poor people. Having such comparative data would allow a researcher to more fully explore the ideas in this project.

Another future research project that would help to advance the ideas in this project would be a sermon-listening seminar involving participants who are materially wealthy and who are materially poor. Ideally, a researcher would assemble a group of listeners in a room, play a video or audio recording of a sermon, and ask the listeners to complete a survey during or after the sermon. The sermon's text, ideally, would be one of the texts included in this paper, such as the parable of the rich fool, or Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. The researcher would ask the listeners to answer questions about the effectiveness of the sermon, how it influences their daily lives, and if they find it to be either condemning or affirming of their relationship with wealth. This kind of research would provide real-world anecdotal information that could prove to be helpful for preachers in any kind of cultural setting.

Conclusion

This project attempts to answer the question: If Jesus was motivated by the Spirit to proclaim good news (the gospel) to the poor, and if preachers now are called to do the same, then how can preachers proclaim the gospel to people who are materially and financially wealthy? The opening supposition was that the gospel of Jesus

Christ is good news for people who can perceive their own poverty, whether that poverty is measured in spiritual/relational or material/financial terms, or both, and that gospel preaching needs to help expose the various kinds of poverty in the hearers' lives to reveal the Savior who brings good news to each kind.

After conducting research and establishing Biblical and theological foundations, the project concludes with three big ideas. These ideas emerged during the research and review phases, when the opening supposition encountered one confirmation of its premise and two surprises. The confirmation was that people do need to see their own unique measurement of poverty before accepting the fact that they need a savior.³⁹ The first surprise was that sometimes preachers contribute to the faith crises of disciplined wealthy Christians by accommodating them on the spiritual issues related to material wealth.⁴⁰ The second surprise was that asking materially wealthy people to consider their poverty has the potential of being moralistic preaching, not gospel preaching, and therefore should be considered discipleship, not evangelism.⁴¹

Beginning with the opening question and supposition, and encountering this confirmation and these surprises, the project concludes with three ideas: the effective preacher to a materially wealthy congregation is simultaneously a cultural insider and outsider; the effective message of the preacher communicates God's gospel before it communicates God's law; and receptive hearers of the gospel message will eventually

³⁹ See *Chapter Two*, especially the section on Luke's gospel and its various measurements of poverty, wherein the only people who accept Jesus as savior are the ones who admit their need for him.

⁴⁰ See Appendix B and the conclusions from the in-depth interview in *Chapter Four* and *Chapter Five*.

⁴¹ See *Chapter Three* and the discussions surrounding William Willimon's book *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything*.

see their own unique measurement of poverty as they accept the good news to the poor.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

APPENDIX A

PSALM 73 TRANSFORMATIONS

LIFE WITHOUT GOD			LIFE WITH GOD			
Prologue v.1-3	Old View of Others v.4-12	Old View of Self v.13-16	Worship Experience v.17a	New View of Others v.17b-20	New View of Self v.21-26	Epilogue v.27-28
<p>¹ Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.</p> <p>³ For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.</p>	<p>I am judgmental, I have a low view of God, Eyes: Horizontal</p> <p>⁴ For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. ⁵ They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. ⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. ⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. ⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. ¹¹ And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" ¹² Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.</p>	<p>I am self-righteous, Self-pitying, and Exhausted</p> <p>¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,</p>	<p>I encounter God in worship</p> <p>¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;</p>	<p>I have pity for others</p> <p>then I discerned their end. ¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. ¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! ²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.</p>	<p>I am aware of my own sin, God is my treasure, I am connected to God, Eyes: Vertical</p> <p>²¹ When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, ²² I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. ²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.</p>	<p>²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.</p> <p>²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.</p>

APPENDIX B

“RICHARD” FULL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

The following interview was conducted on Monday, June 20, 2016, in Greenwich, CT. The name “Richard” is a pseudonym to conceal the identity of the interviewee. Other personal or business names have been redacted. The audio interview was transcribed on September 3, 2016.

Nathan: Your age?

Richard: My age is 38 years old.

Nathan: Household income last year?

Richard: Last year household income was eight million dollars

Nathan: Approximate net worth?

Richard: It’s hard to pin down but 70 to 80 million dollars.

Nathan: Briefly describe how you obtained your wealth.

Richard: I graduated from college with absolutely nothing except student debts. I began a career in Wall Street. Beginning in oil and gas investment banking. And then went to business school. Left business with debts in 2005 and began a career in the investing side of oil and gas coming out of business school. That career has been 12ish or 11 years in the making. I’ve grown from entry level to probably the number three or four at a forty billion dollar firm. So it has largely been wealth creation as a result of direct investing and ownership in the firm where I work.

Nathan: Okay. And so it’s really been 11 to 12 years.

Richard: The entire wealth creation event has been six to seven years [of the last years of my life].

Nathan: And the household you grew up in was not particularly wealthy?

Richard: Was very not wealthy. My mom was a teacher. My father worked for 41 years for the IRS as a tax collector. And commuted on a bus every single day to NYC

and back. They had a mortgage on their 2000 square foot house until I paid it off. So it was very super simple living.

Nathan: Would you say middle class?

Richard: I would say decidedly middle class. My parents total aggregate household income between the two of them at their peak earnings was maybe 120 to 130 thousand dollars.

Nathan: Have you ever been made to feel guilty about your wealth by a Christian preacher?

Richard: Absolutely

Nathan: You have? Can you describe that experience?

Richard: I'll have to sort of pick just one but it isn't... I grew up Catholic and was raised in a Catholic church. The parable of "the challenge of the rich man. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to get into heaven" was preached at least once a year. It was really always tied to the message that the accumulation of any worldly possessions in excess was basically damning to your soul. I went to catholic school my entire life until college. So I was the only person in my family to go to a non-Catholic education institution when I went to [redacted Ivy League school] as an undergrad. And all throughout all forms of education, but particularly from priests, was that poverty is loved by God. Mother Theresa was always a model in terms of really abandonment of possessions in pursuit of the poor.

Nathan: And on the other hand, wealth accumulation was perceived by you as a sin basically.

Richard: It wasn't perceived as a sin, no. It was perceived by me as incompatible with spiritual completeness. Incompatible with really attaining the highest and closest measure of God's favor, and the highest and closest relationship with my God. So that money and stuff would distance me from my God.

Nathan: So how has that played out when you have accumulated wealth?

Richard: It's complicated. I think that there is no question that I feel incredible amounts of guilt on multiple times a day as I see the expressions of my wealth. Cars, planes, homes, trips, purchases, jewelry, all of that constantly reminds me in those events that they are distancing events from my God, intellectually. With that being said, I feel, as I've gotten older I have gotten closer and closer to my God. And so what I struggle with often times is... First of all, is it incompatible that the accumulation of my wealth has created distance from my God? Or is it sort of the absence of the unknown? I have no way of knowing that if I weren't to have these material possessions would my relationship with my God be even closer, would be even deeper? I

always view my relationship with my God as sort of an asymptotic line. It will never be complete. It will never be as full as I want it to be. I am always reaching for it to be deeper, richer, more complete. That, sure it may be okay right now but could it be better had I had a different financial set up. A less robust, financial set up.

Nathan: Thank you for sharing that. What I want to do twice during this interview is read a Bible passage and have you respond to it. Just tell me what your thoughts are. Two of them. The first one is Luke 12: 13-21. I'll just read it. You're probably familiar with it.

Richard: I know it exactly what it is.

Nathan: I just want to see how it lands on you.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Richard: I think you laid emphasis in the part of the reading where I want to hear. So every time I hear it... I've heard it, I can't count how many times. I hear the end that you are not rich toward God. That's what I want to hear. That's the part of the parable I always... My deepest crisis of faith happens when I believe I am rationalizing my belief system to accommodate my reality. And it happens most around money and material possessions. So when I hear that parable I hear the first 80% of it as damning to my situation. And I hear the last sentence as hope. As the sort of inspiration or the path towards righteousness. I really don't think about money and righteousness. I think about money and relationship with God. I think about that last sentence as sort of the path to the deeper relationship I'm looking for with God. But I can't get out of my mind the first portions of the parable, which to me feel quite damning towards accumulation and stuff. The biggest reaction always comes at the end which is, I have a sigh of relief that I hear that last line and I immediately have a feeling of semi-anxiety that I am rationalizing. I am using the last line of Jesus's words to rationalize the very clear and spoken text he's given us before then which seem to be almost a slamming of building stuff.

Nathan: Tiny little side note. I do not have a net worth like yours at all. Or an income like yours. But I have a lot of the same guilt and hope in the gospel patterns that you

do. So that unknown thing you were talking about earlier... You and I are the same age so if you did have my level of income, you might have some of the same.

Richard: And I will say I've had it as long as I can remember. When I was an investment banker analyst and I made \$45,000 a year. And I graduated from [Ivy League School] in [redacted year]. I'll never forget when I got paid my first bonus of \$10,000; I had an incredible amount of anxiety about the fact that what truly was the right stewardship for that money. Nowadays I write 10, 20, \$40,000 check a day for various expenses in our lives. It's the same sense of anxiety that money has hindered me in some way from really closeness with God. And it has happened all throughout my life. That's why it was interesting when you first asked me about my income at work it was the first time in really forever I thought about the numbers in the context of the dilemma. The dilemma to me has been ever since I earned my first paycheck. It hasn't changed in nature or dimension. It's become more severe in intensity in terms of my pre-occupation with it. But the presence of it hasn't grown for change.

Nathan: Approximately how many friends do you have that are wealthier than you are?

Richard: If I had to count how many friends I have that have 100 million dollar plus net worth. Maybe 30-40 friends.

Nathan: I was doing some research on the zip codes surrounding our church and saw a statistic that there are eight known billionaires in the town of Greenwich who have primary residence in the town of Greenwich.

Richard: And I would just say those are the known billionaires. I know six or seven that are not on the Forbes list because of the businesses they are in that don't afford them. The list those are generated off of are generated off of people who have public assets like shares in companies or who have sold companies. But your typical hedge fund manager who doesn't have to disclose to anybody what he or she is worth would never appear on a list like that. I know seven or eight billionaires in the town of Greenwich who don't fall on that list.

Nathan: Do you ever fantasize about their level of wealth thinking "If I had that I would worry less"?

Richard: Here's the thing about that. If fantasize were the word the answer is no. Am I motivated by additional wealth accumulation to solve "problems" or to create "opportunities" that additional wealth would afford me? Absolutely. I have never been a person who has a target in my mind. Like to have 100 million, 200 million. If you asked me when I was 18 years old these numbers would have sounded ridiculous. I think about it in terms of if I can continue to work and earn. And if that earning creates more dollars and money, can I do other things with it? And am I motivated by that? Absolutely. I don't fantasize about anything. I do drive motivation from that. With that being said, in my highest and best moments, the ideas of what I think I'd

want to do with all of that additional wealth creation is different than maybe how it's been used up until now. But what I will say is in my most vented moments I will recognize that I probably have that same spiritual aspiration before I accumulated this amount of wealth. And I haven't made the progress towards using this amount of wealth in the way I thought I would have. To me it is emblematic, symptomatic, diagnostic of the dilemma, which is, as the wealth continues to accumulate has it created this permanent implacable distance between me and my God because I am not flexing with that wealth creation.

Nathan: Do you ever worry about your money?

Richard: Every single minute of every single day.

Nathan: Can you talk about what exactly the worry is centered on?

Richard: Having not grown up with any, I don't worry about losing it. Let me say I worry less about losing it. Because I think I'd have to do some really crazy things to lose that much money. Although crazier things have been done. I worry about mis-managing it. I worry about it being a legacy for my family that I don't steward properly. I worry about my not making the decisions with it. So those are my worries about it. And I think about it way more than is healthy but I think about it a lot.

Nathan: This is a topic all throughout the Bible. I read all the relevant passages all in one sitting one time. Just a whole bunch of New Testament stuff about wealth. When I walked away from that, if I could think of one central idea that God was trying to convey it was don't worry about your money. Whether you have very little or if you have a ton, don't worry about it. That's what I was struck by. Because I worry about ours all the time. And I make more than I thought I would going into ministry. And now Nancy has a job and my wealth went up 30%, and so did my worry.

Richard: I was just going to say my worry has flexed greater as I've gotten more money. That's been the part that is most disturbing to me and most unsettling. And in my deepest and darkest moments, confirming of my fear. Despite the fact that I feel like my relationship with my God has deepened and has become as profound as it has in my entire adult life. It has confirmed my fear that I'm obviously, as it relates money, not making progress. And I have beliefs as to why that is. Not making progress toward surrender as it relates to the invitation not to worry about my money. That I may be doing in other aspects of my life. I think to a large degree it's because we don't talk about it. I'm not preached about it. I'm not invited to lay those worries at the table of God the way I am with the worries of my relationships, the worries about my parenting. It's not something we hear. But yes, my worries have flexed with the size of the pie, which is insane and feels so foolish.

Nathan: Are there people in your life that you suspect are jealous of your wealth.

Richard: Absolutely. Yes.

Nathan: Are you ever jealous of someone else's wealth.

Richard: No. I really am not I have to say. I'm trying not to be Pollyanna about it. I really don't. The only thing when I look at other people that are demonstrably wealthier than me, the only thing I think of is if I'm on that path, is that a path to solve these other things. Not because I covet their life, not because I covet their things. It's more about, can I get to that same place because of what I can do for me.

Nathan: I'm going to read another bible passage and I just want you to respond to it. This is Jesus and Zacchaeus. This is Luke 19: 1-10.

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through. ²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Richard: So my reaction every time I hear it, I have goose bumps and shivers all throughout my body. The word that jumps out in that entire passage is that Jesus received him joyfully. To me, this is as much a message about Jesus being salvation, Jesus welcoming and embracing me no matter how I come to him, no matter how I'm perceived by others, no matter how I am judged by my peers or society. And no matter what is really in my heart. Whether it's good, bad, corrupt or noble. So for me, I love the fact that he was received joyfully. And the rest of it to me was all ornamental to that.

Nathan: Well the contrast between the grumbling crowd and Jesus' pursuing love.

Richard: I'm sorry can you read the last one more time to.

Nathan: ⁹And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Richard: It's the last part, which is also where the Spirit moves me. Again, the son of man came to seek the lost. My analogy and how it lands on me is I wake up every day with a sense of gratitude, wisdom, and relationship with God. But with deep acceptance of the fact that I am and always will be spiritually lost. There are different measures of lost. I've lived in and around New York City my whole entire life. I know every street in that entire town. Could I get lost at various moments and disori-

ented when I get up from the Subway? Yes. It's solvable in minutes. If you landed me in the Mojave Desert or in a forest, that is a different type of lost. I'm not saying it's all crisis level lost. But what I love about it is that no matter where I am in my directionlessness, which I know is my current state of affairs every day of my life and will be until I die. Because I will never be closest enough with my God ever. I'll never reach that point of pure and absolute adherence because of sin. And so I know that because I'll always have distance and I'll always be lost. I love the last part. That he is seeking me and he is saving me. It isn't just about the salvation. It isn't just the answer on the other side. He is coming for me. He is looking for me because I am God's child and I am loved by him. That is the Lord sitting on my shoulder. When I hear Satan sitting on my shoulder it is, "You accommodating fool." Because at the end of the day the biggest fear I have as a blood bought Christian of Jesus is that I sit back and I say to myself don't you dare rationalize bad behavior, bad decisions, and errant paths in life, because you know you'll be saved. Don't make decisions that you know you're just going to say "God I'm going to go ante up at the bar later and I'll see you at the other side of this. I'm going to go make these bad decisions, I know they are spiritually bankrupt, I know it's corrupt, I know it distances me from you but I know you've got me on the other side. I know that you'll save me on the other side. I'll come to you when I'm ready and I've had my fun. And that is my biggest fear. There is the message of salvation and search. Which to me gives me great comfort. And there is the message I hear in my own head of fear. That I'm building my life around the knowledge of that and taking advantage of it for my God.

Nathan: Awesome. You know I just remembered this from this particular text. Zacchaeus is called three different things in the text. Luke calls him "Rich." Luke is the narrator. And that is actually a neutral term. The grumblers call him "a sinner." Jesus calls him "lost." Those two terms "Sinners" and "Lost" are loaded with very different – you know. Thank you for all of that. I heard you so resonating with Zacchaeus. The way that I heard that last part was "never wanting to take for granted His grace."

Richard: Yeah and I think as an adult I've always struggled with really receiving God's grace and knowing it's really there for my taking. It's proffered to me. I don't really ask for it. Even further, he wants to give it to me. Intellectually I know that. My heart says "You undeserving, unclean, child of God, whose soul was bought for you on the cross. Yet you act in ways that distance you from the God who sacrifices his only son for you." And that's my deepest moments of incompatibility with respect to the whole issue.

Nathan: I want you think about your relationships. The love you receive and the love you give. When you consider those relationships, do you generally feel relationally rich or relationally poor?

Richard: I feel very relationally rich in the love I receive. I feel very relationally rich in the love I give. I've always been very generous with the people that I love. To some degree it was probably in a response to wanting to shower people I love with

things. But I have always felt relationally rich. I've felt that I have people that love me and feel like I have always been blessed to give and show love.

Nathan: So even before you had financial wealth, you felt relationally rich?

Richard: Yes. I felt relationally rich before I had wealth. But I fear and suspect that my wealth has enabled me to be relationally richer. By the way, that tastes disgusting coming out but I'm just being truthful. I'm trying to be contemplative about it. The reason I say that is because I have found that the experiences I have been able to afford the people that I love because of my wealth has created deep affection. Moments, experiences that have become the seeds of love in many unique ways. I haven't thought about whether or not those same seeds of loves could have sprouted absent what the financial richness afforded.

Nathan: Can you give an example of that?

Richard: Trips. Private planes. Taking my best buddies in NY and flying up to our house in Nantucket doing a day sailing, grilling out on the beach with a caterer that has done lobsters and clams. And for us talking for years about that. Me flying my children down to Palm Beach on a private plane in the middle of the winter for a way for us to frolic and love. Not doing the JetBlue line at LaGuardia. Intellectually do I know that I could have created the same relationally rich relationships? Yes. But my life is also crazy full and there's a separate conversation as to why it's so full. Compacting it into these really powerful experiences has resulted in a lot of love. I don't know if it's healthy love or good love. I don't know if it's love that started in the right place. But I'm smart enough to know that it's good love at the other side of it.

Nathan: It generates good will. It sounds fun.

Richard: Another example: My parents worked their entire life. They had very mediocre savings. At some point not only did I pay off the mortgage in the house that I grew up in. I bought them a condo in Florida that is nothing my wife or family would ever stay in. But if it was there dream, but I don't even remember how much I paid for it. But to this day it has brought them the most joy. I bought my father a hunting lodge in the Poconos. It's been six years. I paid \$180,000. I've never been there. I have no interest. I have no desire. We were together for Father's day. One of his embraces was "I just love that place so much and I love you so much for giving me that." Could that love have been created in other ways? Of course. Probably. But I can't deny that I am relationally richer because of that richness.

Nathan: This is so good because this is not something I was pre-supposing in my dissertation at all. But what I'm getting out of it is that you are describing a very healthy generosity that is tied in relationship and that's a taste of the father's generosity. That Ephesians passage where it says, "God lavishes upon us." What you are describing is that you are able to lavish, through material, through financial wealth, material blessing.

Richard: My only point on that is what my wife would say is my greatest faults. In that I love giving, giving, giving. I would give everything to everybody just because I love giving.

Nathan: Does she call it a fault because it puts you at risk?

Richard: No she calls it a fault because my wife, who really doesn't have deeply held Christian principles, she believes that giving and receiving should be paired with merit. So that people who receive, do they deserve it? Why are you giving what you worked hard for to people who may not deserve it? Why are you giving something that otherwise might be the bounty of our children when we pass away. It's all these questions ownership and possession and deserving. So that's a separate sort of conversation. The question really around giving to me that I worry about is – So I love to give and I love the image of the lavishly giving father. And I think about the prodigal son a lot as it relates to that parable and the implications for giving selfishly. I worry a lot that I'm giving for the right reasons.

Nathan: Okay so what would be a bad reason?

Richard: A bad reason is that I'm looking for love in return. A bad reason is I'm looking for affirmation, accolade applause.

Nathan: That's a deep issue

Richard: If I'm being really honest, I think that a solid portion, I don't know if it's a majority. Even with my children and my most coveted relationships. A lot of my giving is driven by the desire and the enjoyment of receiving the affirmation applause. It's an issue for me and it's always been an issue for me. I know it has to do with other issues as it relates to why I need that affirmation or why I searched for that recognition and applause. But I'm always looking to graduate into a mindset of giving where the giving... And I always say to myself, if I gave this away, I wanted to give it away and never hear about it again and just be happy about it. And I can do that. I get criticized by my friends. I will give to every single homeless person I meet on the street, 10 15 dollars. I will often times have to be careful because I carry hundreds of dollars with me I will give it all to someone I meet on the street. I will often times say they are going to use it for drugs. My view is that God has never asked me what a poor person is going to do with the money that I give them. God instructs me to be generous and merciful. I don't really preoccupy myself with how they would spend their money. But those are small. It's easy. That's not spiritually challenging to me. What's hard is to make the big acts of generosity. We even do it with our philanthropy, we give an enormous amount of money to educational institutions ([Ivy League School], [Another Ivy League School]) where I full know well there is a recognition component to it. At some point my children will be applying to these very schools and there should be some bounty that I reap in reward for my generosity. That doesn't strike me as really spiritually filled giving. I think a lot about the bible passage that

God loves a cheerful giver. And I can be cheerful all day long about giving. I love giving. But, is the motivation around my giving really what God desires of me? I have to be honest and say most of the time probably not. I think a lot about intentions and consequences. Let's say I am cheerful in my giving but the giving comes from the wrong reasons of my heart, but the result is the same for the receiver, I struggle a lot with, then okay should it matter? Of course I know it should matter for myself. But if my parents are going to get a quarter of a million dollar condo in Florida, and whether or not I get no joy out of that or I get joy from accolade and applause. They get that joy. It shouldn't matter what my motivations are. Of course I know it does but that's where I wrestle.

Nathan: That's interesting. You and I are very alike in the sense that we are always analyzing our own intentions.

Richard: All the time. I've had meaningful relationships. The most recent one in my life. I am a thinker from the minute I get up at 2am to go to the bathroom. I wake up and on my mind are these thoughts. It's as if I've been awake for six hours. I think about things constantly to the point where I am always evaluating.

Nathan: That's probably what makes you a great investor.

Richard: I do have to say from the perspective of doing what I love all day long, I am constantly weighing risks. Every single element of my job is evaluating the risks versus the rewards of certain actions. Of certain decisions. Of certain information. I can't divorce that mindset to every other part of my life. I wind up evaluating everything through the merits of what's the risk versus the rewards. What's the risk to my soul? What's the risk to the relationship with my God. That is sometimes helpful and often times debilitating.

Nathan: Would you like to hear more from your preachers on this or less?

Richard: I am by my design a salvation Christian. As I think about what the corporate prayer does for me, I think about the most powerful parts of how it spills into my week. I am being reminded that Jesus seeks me. I am being reminded that Jesus has saved me. That's a really convenient passive dominated view that I'm looking to receive when I go to church. My always presupposition is that the relationship between my faith and my money generally is hard and doesn't come to a good conversation at the end. Do I want to hear more about it? Of course I do. Because I want to sharpen the tools that I have to have a better and more complete relationship with my God. It's foolish to believe that I can do that without this dimension being addressed. So yes I want to hear more about it. But I want to also recognize that there is a fear and anxiety to hearing more about it. My best self says "yes receive it", my worst self says "no, you are saved."

Nathan: The last part of my work is going to be sort of a field guide for preachers who are in financially wealthy congregations and I'm going to try to give them. Right

now my idea is a Psalm 73 mentality. Psalm 73 is this wonderful prayer from Asaph who was the chief musician in Solomon's temple. We started learning about him in 1 Chronicles. It's a rags to riches story. So he himself goes from being invited to get into the band to the chief musician in Solomon's temple. And he writes this prayer in Psalm 73 where he confesses to God that he was both envious and despising the rich. And then in the middle of the Psalm there is this phrase that hinges the whole song. The phrase is "Until I went into the sanctuary of God." After that he realizes his own bitterness. He realizes most importantly, the preciousness of God. One of the things that I'm going to try to conclude my paper with is that preachers don't necessarily need to tell rich people about money. But instead to create by the whole spirit an atmosphere in which people encounter their savior. And when that happens in church all the other things come into perspective

Richard: From the vantage point of a congregant; a perspective that I know is shared with other members of the congregation because I've heard it. Which is that pastor Nathan gets up and he is going to talk about wealth and how wealth and closeness to God is not necessarily incompatible. And the conclusion is, here is an accommodating pastor of a really wealthy church who is finding a way to rationalize and not challenge his congregation because he's got to keep people in the pews.

Nathan: So are you saying you would rather hear challenges on this?

Richard: I come to church and I sit in the pews to hear from you what you spend your life and your mindshare dwelling in the word of God. I want you to give to me what you believe is the essence of the word of God in my life. Good, bad indifferent, hard, easy. I want the salvation message, I want the challenge message. But I may not be your representative congregant. So I want you to be aware that I think a lot of people that come to a church like this, you know. I am not sure a lot of people are coming to be challenged in the pews. As a result of that if you were to get up and preach that "everything you've heard about the eye of the needle is sort of nuanced and here is the nuances about it." The challenge that you have is to a spiritually rich few is that you are accommodating this setting because you have to. That I think is something that I think you can't deny as a challenge. That's how I see it. The first question you asked, "has a pastor or preacher ever made you feel guilty about money" and the answer is decidedly yes. I'd be shocked if my experience is unique. I think the challenge for you is to reverse that mainstream American Christian teaching. It's super hard.

Nathan: That's what I'm trying to do. When I first started researching this, I actually have a stack of books in my car and almost every single one is "Rich people need to give away more money. Rich people should not have what they have. Rich people are corrupt. God hates that. God is on the side of the poor." And I look at that I think, where is the book that tries to understand a rich person on his or her own terms and how Jesus would view that person and how to preach the gospel to that person without expectation of giving more away. But just to try to understand them. But if they respond like Zacchaeus did with generosity, awesome. That's God's to do. My to-do

as a preacher is to just understand and love and go into the house of God. If there is a poverty of generosity to actually try to challenge that as well.

Richard: That sounds super convenient. There is going to be a lot of scholarship that has to underpin that. I love that. Everything you just said. But I think that a lot of Christians have been schooled in our churches, which is that the stack of books is the message. Part of it is like teachings on homosexuality and teachings on divorce. The language in the bible appears to be quite clear. Where you are looking, whether it's responding to the joyfulness or the tale of spiritually poor. It to me, strikes me as a searching for the hope. Versus setting aside the biblically rich and painfully direct dimensions that speak to corruptness of wealth. I am hopeful that there is a subtlety in the text that has just been largely overlooked because of the convenience of reading it quite literally. Or reading it in a way that focuses on the 80% and not the 20% of the text. I'm hopeful that is the case. Though as a bible reading Christian I haven't been afforded that interpretation.

Nathan: When I read Luke, I think Luke might have been thinking about this topic more than we realize. When I read Acts, you almost can find a journey he is on. Lydia was very wealthy. The stories on either side were very poor marginalized people. And then he goes back to a rich person. I'm wondering if I need to focus on Gospel and wealth in the writings of Luke.

Richard: [Redacted personal detail]. Luke is my favorite of all the gospels. To me, it competes with John. At the end of the day there is a balance to Jesus that always seems to be presented in Luke that may be particularly interesting when you think about gospel and wealth. But there is always a love strain in Luke that I seem to find there that I don't find in the way that Jesus' story is presented in the other gospels.

Nathan: Thank you for all of your time and sharing of ideas. I am grateful.

APPENDIX C

“MARY” FULL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

The following interview was conducted on Wednesday, November 30, 2016, in New Canaan, CT. The name “Mary” is a pseudonym to conceal the identity of the interviewee. Other personal or business names have been redacted. The audio interview was transcribed on December 2, 2016.

Nathan: What is your household income?

Mary: So technically I have zero household income. I pretty much live like a missionary these days. That hasn’t always been the case. I haven’t had income since I left – I used to work for a hedge fund. Since the last time I filed taxes for getting unemployment, that was probably four years ago. So I haven’t had technical income but the Lord just keeps providing in so many different ways.

Nathan: Can you give me some examples? Like where do you live?

Mary: Somehow, the Lord seems to tell people to just give me money. Or that different bills need to be paid. Or that I need food or whatever the case may be. I’ve had multiple times where people have paid my rent. People have given me money for gas. I also do Graphic Design work. So the church will need something and they’ll hire me – like that. It hasn’t in this last four years been anything like a lump sum that I’ve gotten from a paycheck. And it’s never steady. So it’s always been kind of sporadic. But it’s always been kind of consistent. Well I guess that’s kind of – I’m saying steady that it’s kind of...

Nathan: There’s no monthly paycheck but there has been a steady stream of people being generous.

Mary: Yes. And the Lord’s been consistent. And me not having to ask for any of it.

Nathan: And your age?

Mary: Can I say I’m close to 40?

Nathan: Of course! And, what is your approximate net worth?

Mary: Okay so I guess with my car and my – I guess that means everything minus your bills?

Nathan: All of your assets, minus your debts.

Mary: I think I have a negative net worth because I have student loans.

Nathan: Okay. So there's no paycheck to paycheck there's just the Lord's provision. Do you have a savings account?

Mary: I do have a savings account. Often it has been depleted but I have a savings account, I can say that.

Nathan: Okay good. I'm glad that you do because I want us to interact with this text now, as our next question. I'm going to read this to you, "the parable of the rich fool." Luke 12:13-21. I'm just going to read this out loud and then I want you to give me your thoughts about it. What do you think God is communicating through it and how might it apply to you?

Mary: Okay.

Nathan:

The Parable of the Rich Fool – Luke 12:13-21

<p>¹³ Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."</p>
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<p>¹⁴ But Jesus said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter over you?"¹⁵ Then he said to them, "Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness; for one's life does not consist in an abundance of his possessions."</p>
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<p>¹⁶ And he told them the parable saying: "The land of a rich man produced plentifully. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'</p>
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<p>¹⁸ "And he said, 'I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods.' ¹⁹ And I'll say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax; eat, drink, be merry."</p>
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<p>²⁰ "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you. These things you have prepared, whose will they be?'</p>

<p>²¹ "So is the one who lays out treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."</p>
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Nathan: So just react to that for me, theologically, personally.

Mary: Can you read that one more time because there were a number of things where I was like, yes that that and that!

Nathan: Sure. [REDACTED, READS LUKE 12:13-21 AGAIN]

Mary: Yeah that's saying a lot. The first thing would be the focus. I feel like the Lord is saying when the first person asks him to tell his brothers to distribute his inheritance properly the Lord is like, "Why am I supposed to be the judge over that. Those things are earthly." And not that earthly things are not important, but he was focused

on his reasons for being here. I felt like he was saying to the guy, lift your vision higher. There is so much more. And then through the parable he is explaining the part that he was trying to give the guy. There's so much more and you're totally missing it because of the earthly things you are striving over. So I guess the part of it that really hits home with me is, in my own life. Like I said, I used to work for a hedge fund and never made so much money in my life. Never. Yet I don't think I was ever as stressed in my life either. And I grew up really – my family was not very wealthy. Being in this place for the first time in my life and not having to worry about anything and actually being able to sew more money than I made in previous years into other people's lives. That really blessed me. But at the same time, even though I never made so much money in my life. I don't think I ever experienced the place of greater longing for more of the Lord.

Nathan: Just to clarify, the place where you felt a great longing for the Lord is when you were earning a lot of money.

Mary: When I had tons of money. I had lots of money but an emptiness. I did a few things to try to fill that place. But because I had money I had options. I was traveling, I was giving to causes I really believed in. Helping people that I just wanted to help. All those things. But nothing filled that place on the inside. The more money I made the more I longed. I remember the first year that I had this really great bonus sitting at my desk, and I remember thinking, "I can't live like this." And I said, "Okay this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to take my lunch break. I'm not going to eat lunch. I will just grab food and eat lunch at my desk. I'm just going to take my lunch break, go sit in my car and pray for the whole hour." Because I have got to have more of you [God] in my heart. My heart felt dry. Like I really needed water. And in my mind grew up all through college knowing this was what I was working for and all of these years of being poor thinking, "This is it! I'm gonna finally get it!" And finally getting it, my heart being at a place of – it wasn't despair, but it was great longing. I used the money for great things and it felt great for a while. But it didn't last. It's so funny because when I was leaving the hedge fund, I said in January, I want to be out of here in June. I didn't think God took it seriously and then when June came, my boss was like, "Yeah this isn't working out." I was so happy! The woman who did my exit interview was like, "Why are you smiling?" I said, "I don't know!" I was so happy! She was like, "Don't rub it in!" I can't even explain it. I'm telling you, that time when I had all of that money, and when I was on unemployment, I really dove head first into God. You are really what I've wanted. All those shiny things I've had before, yeah I don't have those. But I want you. You are it. So I took that time in every day. I came to the church every day. I don't know, I think I did this for a month. And just all day, prayed. Some days I fasted. Just prayed and worshiped. Every day I would say, tell me who you are. And then he answered me with this one thing, he gave me the scripture about Mary of Bethany and how she came and she sat at his feet. The oil she poured on his feet was worth a year's wages. He said, "I want you to give me a year." And in my mind, I was like "you can have ten years! If I get you, you can have it all." I come here, and I start to really – he starts to answer me and tell me really who he is. [Redacted story]. So okay. I don't know if I'm answering your question.

Nathan: You certainly are. Let me ask you what you think about this last statement from Jesus, where he says “So is the one who lays out treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” What do you think that phrase means?

Mary: So when we’re laying out treasure for ourselves, honestly, and I’ve done it myself. There’s so many things that we want here. There’s so many things that draw our attention. And stir up things on the inside of us because of different things that are not healed. And for a number of different reasons. And we’re constantly trying to get those things. And constantly trying to make a way for us to feel secure in our own strength. It’s a place of strength. And it’s a place of, “I can do this and I don’t need your help.” That’s not the kingdom. That’s not God. And it’s not the love that he has for us.

Nathan: What do you think he meant by, “Being rich toward God.”

Mary: So I think that’s also like in Revelation where he’s talking to the church. And he’s talking about, “You think you’re wealthy but, but you’re naked, and blind and wretched. You need to buy from me Gold.” And I asked him, “How do you buy Gold from an eternal God? What is the currency that a holy God would receive?” And it’s your life. And that’s exactly what that scripture is talking about. Exact word that is in that scripture. It’s your life. It’s using your life to invest in the things that are pleasing to God. Invest in the things that are in your heart.

Can I just share this with you? I was in this prayer meeting and we were praying for inner cities in America. Somebody was talking about Chicago and all the murders that have taken place there. And my heart was breaking at the idea that all of these, often times single moms, are losing their only son and nobody is doing anything about it. My heart was breaking. And this word came forth. Someone had this word. The Lord is saying, “There’s a real burden on my heart. Do you want it?” And in my heart I was like, “God I want it but at the same time, I don’t know if I want it because I’m afraid you are going to make me do something that I’m going to be inconvenienced or uncomfortable.” Later on I was like, “No. I don’t care. You are my everything. And whatever is burdening your heart. Whatever I can do to release that burden, I want that.” And later on he gave me what he wanted me to do. And yes it’s going to be an inconvenience, but at the same time, the thought in my mind brought me to tears. Because I was thinking, “These are real people. And this is a real God who loves them. And I’m mulling over the idea that I’m going to be inconvenienced. Or that I’m going to have to stand in faith to believe in the finances to do what he asks me to do? Are you serious? These are people who are dying and going to hell who do not have another chance. And God loves them and wants to reach them. And I’m worried about if I’m going to have to take a couple extra trips. That’s what he’s talking about. This is what’s on my heart; this is what you can use your life for. Sorry if that was too long.

Nathan: No this is all great stuff. This is all very relevant and all very good stuff. You don’t need to apologize. It’s fine. I have a few more questions to get through.

This may sound like a strange question but it's relevant to my overall thesis. Approximately how many friends do you have that are wealthier than you are?

Mary: Oh my goodness, a lot of them.

Nathan: Would you say most of them?

Mary: Not most of them. Because I like to have people that have more and know more than I do. But I on purpose try to stay connected to people who don't. Because I feel like it's important. How else are you going to bring them up if you aren't connected to them? And then how else are you going to learn? And also the people that are wealthier than me, there is a lot that they need that they don't know because they are surrounded by the barriers of their money.

Nathan: Interesting... "the barriers of their money." Are you jealous of anyone else's wealth in your life?

Mary: I'm not jealous. I think that I've become close enough to them that I love them – I don't want to say "in spite of" because it makes their wealth is a bad thing. But I just see past it. And I have friends that know that I'm friends with these wealthy people. And I've tried to protect that. These are my friends. How else will I be able to speak any truth into their life if I'm constantly letting people, who need money and don't care about them, poach them.

Nathan: For a moment I want you to think about your relationships. The love you receive and the love that you give. When you consider those relationships do you feel relationally rich or relationally poor?

Mary: Oh my goodness I feel relationally rich. I do. But in that same thing, even though I'm relationally rich, that love, giving and receiving of it is very risky. I have even seen that when I had more money I would use the money instead of my being in that place of risk and being close to people. It's safer if I can just give you an expensive gift. Can I tell you an experience?

Nathan: Please do.

Mary: One of the girls that I mentor, I've known her since she was 12. She was starting this job. It was something where you have to make appointments with people and you try to sell them something. And so I knew whatever it was she was selling I wasn't going to buy. She was like, "If I make this appointment with you," she just called me because she knows that I love her, she's like, "If I make this appointment with three people, I'll make this much money. Can I make an appointment with you?" And I was like, "Well how much money will you make?" She says, "I'll make 50 or 60 dollars." And I'm like, "Can I just give you the money?" She was like, "I don't want the money!" And I was like, "I'm really busy can I just give you the money." Later on when the Lord showed me that. I was like, "God I'm so sorry."

Nathan: So here was somebody who you were mentoring. She just wanted to be with you. And you said, “How about money instead?”

Mary: She just wanted me to help her. She just wanted me to spend time with her. She was like, can I just practice the sale’s pitch on you?

Nathan: The money could make that risk go away.

Mary: The money made the risk go away and it didn’t do anything to build the relationship.

Nathan: That is really fascinating. I am running into that a lot in my research. Money inherently can create barriers between human relationships.

Mary: But people do it on purpose because it’s safer. Love is risky. It’s risky. I have found, now without so much money, I give myself so much more freely into these relationships. Even though it’s scary. And sometimes I don’t want to. It’s so much more rewarding. You can’t pay money for what I have now.

Nathan: Wonderful. Two more questions. Can you describe just in your own words, the Christian gospel?

Mary: That’s a loaded question these days.

Nathan: Don’t consider it loaded at all. I just want to hear your raw description of that.

Mary: The Christian gospel... It’s good news that there is a real man who sits on the throne at the right hand of the father who came here so that I would – not that I would not have to suffer. But so that I would not have to be separate from him forever. He paid the price for so much more than I will ever understand. So that I could have him. Not just me, but other people. So that I could be free from the grips of the enemy. There’s so much more to it, I don’t know that I could give you more than that in two sentences. You can stop me whenever you need to. He’s God. He’s an eternal God. He came here to live like I have to live so that he could win the power from me to live this thing in a way that I would have true treasure in heaven. That I would have his nearness here. And that I would have his purpose for my life. Which is far greater than anything I could have for myself.

Nathan: I’m going to stop you there because that’s very relevant and good.

Mary: Okay good because I could go on forever.

Nathan: I would actually love to hear more but... yeah. So then lastly, I mentioned earlier about Luke Chapter 4. I just want to remind you, it’s Jesus’s first public state-

ment. It's the first time we hear him speak on anything, Luke Chapter 4. He chose to quote Isaiah. To say, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." What do you think Jesus meant by that?

Mary: Yeah because he hadn't gone to the cross yet. Well I think that the rest of that is part of that good news. That's part of what I was talking about. That power to be free from so many of the things that keep us captive here. And even as I just said that I had the thought of how I was captive to the finances. Not that he has freed me from finances because I know that is all coming. But this thing on the inside had to be corrected first. This freedom to the prisoners. Prison isn't always being behind bars. Sometimes a prison is here, and here. In your heart. And sight to the blind. That's not just physically blind. But seeing people the way God sees them. And seeing in yourself the truth about who you are. And seeing yourself the way God sees you. And not just the bad stuff, because he's really looking past that stuff to your heart. The stuff that he put in there. That's what he's talking about.

Nathan: Let me ask you this. Let's pretend that there's someone sitting in this chair. Someone who makes 8 million dollars a year. Who has a net worth of close to 100 million dollars. And it was your job to communicate to him the gospel, which Jesus called, "Good news to the poor." Let's just go with that first phrase. How would you explain to him that Jesus is good news to the poor and that Jesus is good news to him.

Mary: I think that you would have to explain what Jesus meant by "the poor." Because Jesus wasn't just talking about the materially poor. You would have to explain to him, this is what Jesus was talking about. And then, "Does any of this bare witness with you?" Sometimes I don't think you even have to ask. Because when you explain what Jesus meant by the poor, people identify themselves in there. Everyone is poor in some way because we're all human. We're all poor in some area. Just because you are materially wealthy, that's not what he was talking about. So when you explain what he really meant you don't even have to try and reach him because the word will reach him itself. Does that make sense?

Nathan: Perfect. Really good. I'm going to turn off the recording here in a moment unless there is anything else maybe the Holy Spirit has laid on your heart. Here's your opportunity to say it out.

Mary: Okay let's see.

The only thing that I keep hearing is that phrase, "Buy gold from me."

APPENDIX D

CLASS PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TRANSCRIPTION

Reflections on Matthew 5:2-13; Luke 6:20-26 (the Sermon on the Mount); and 1 Timothy 6:6-11

Participant 1: One thing that jumped out on the bottom page that spoke to me about the love of money. I think you have to look back at *if we have food and clothing, all our needs taken care of* and that's not enough. We want more. Jumps out at me. People are not satisfied with just comfortable living.

Participant 2: A few weeks ago had an opportunity to walk the neighborhood. I was amazed how high we are near here. On one road we could look all the way down to the Long Island Sound. We are a church on a hill. But we are surround by castles. I was amazed by what I saw...I wrote a blog. I want to share a paragraph from it. I changed the relationship of money and what it does to you with freedom. The association with money—it frees us. But I'm not sure if that's the case.

Blog: As I reflected on the house that Mr. [redacted] built, I was struck by the juxtaposition between money and freedom. Money is advertised as the great liberator. Once you have enough money, you are freed of the normal constraints that bind many of us. And yet, here was a walled fortress that resembled a beautifully appointed prison. It seemed so incongruous, and yet, so necessary. [redacted]'s billions bought him all kinds of benefits that have come to be emblems of the American Dream. But with unimaginable wealth comes unimaginable constraints that require walls of obligations, fears and worries.

I just thought that the things as a young man – money would be a solution for our problems. Money is not only a freedom killer it's going to be an isolation builder.

Participant 3: I drive here with [the men's recovery ministry] every Wednesday from the center of Bridgeport. From James Street, the side of the road has trash, buildings and factories condemned, homeless people. But there is life everywhere. You hear music, you hear laughter, and you hear voices. Constant movement. People running around in the street. Life everywhere. Lots of sin as well. But we drive to Greenwich in the van and I see it change – the atmosphere around us. Every time, no matter what happens, we pull in to this area and guys ooh and ahh at everything. There is this mansion with a seven-car garage and we are all oohing and ahing. Myself, in my youth, I lived in a trailer park in Jackson, IL. I still go wow every time I'm here – stunningly beautiful. But I don't see life in this neighborhood. I don't see people in their yards. In Bridgeport, yeah it's run-down. But there I see life, exuberance and people living. Here I just see houses. This is something I notice. I see houses that are beautiful, but I don't see the people.

Nathan: [To Participant 2] Does your observation interact with anything that we just read? How so?

Participant 2: I noticed the word “love.” One of the things I have learned at Stanwich is the hierarchy of loves. And I observed it’s very easy in this world to get them all mixed up. So the love of money, love of this, the love of that...if it’s not the love of Jesus Christ. It’s upside down, inside out, sideways, something. And it’s the kind of the passion that motivates us for the things of this world that can confuse us and can trap us. And can even destroy us.

Nathan: Can someone have this love of money “root of evil”? If you don’t have any money?

Participant 4: I read a provocative article the other day, by a woman – I believe an investment banker. She’s a Christian. She felt somewhat guilty about her profession and that she had relatively wealth compared to the rest of the world. So she thought what she needed to do was quit her job and be a missionary some place. Sell everything like the rich young ruler and go off and do good works. Then she thought about it from an economic point of view and she thought perhaps the greater good wouldn’t be to make as much money as she possibly could and use it as a resource to help people in the world. It was sort of an upside down type of thinking. But I wonder if you can do that without making it an idol? That’s the problem. The word that popped out at me that I never noticed before was from Timothy “*but those who desire to be rich fall temptation can be a snare*” It isn’t necessarily a snare, but it certainly can be. But if you can do that. If you can do what she said and make as much money as your ability and your talents allow. And then use that. That’s probably more helpful to people in need than one person going off.

Nathan: So she concluded that way?

Participant 4: That’s her rationalization. But I thought it was a provocative idea.

Nathan: Somewhat similarly I’ve known people who have gone off to missions by guilt motivation. Sounds like she is correcting that. Interesting.

Participant 5: Not to focus on the [redacted]. But a very good point is...sometimes when you have so much. You also have so much sorrow. Some people may not know this here, but he lost his son. Has to deal with that. But one of the things that jumped out at me because I once heard a teaching on this was “blessed are the meek”. They refer to a horse – which of course in livened my attention to it. Because despite the fact my horse weighs 1200lbs. She is willing to be obedient and come under my authority and be a blessing to me in doing that. It’s a position all of these things. Whether you have money or don’t have money they are position of attitude about the things that you have or don’t have. Which could be a stumbling block either way.

Nathan: To summarize - you talked about the Beatitudes being a position of the heart. If you can summarize what is one’s position that people call blessed?

Participant 5: In Timothy it talks about contentment. In my notes it talks about happy. Happy seems so shallow. Like happy happy. What makes me happy? I think its much more of an attitude/disposition of heart...

Nathan: Contentment is different than happiness. The position is contentment before God that's how we are blessed according to this.

Participant 6: For me when I read Timothy. This is all about the heart. The love of money, it's pursuing righteousness. Money is a gift. God gives that to you. It's how you handle that gift. Grant it can be tempting and challenging. In the case of Laura's example – yes I guess you could do that, and give it all up. But I think the challenge is when you have money God wants you to enjoy that money, and be responsible with that money, but how do you use it for good. To me I think money gets a really bad wrap. It's how people handle. Not having money isn't any fun either. Can create envy and discuss in ones heart against/towards someone who may have money. To me it's a total heart issue. Money is not the thing. It's a heart issue.

Participant 7: I'm looking at Matthew 5. You see poor mourn, meek, humble, and merciful. So what I see here are needs. Those needs would be met. Because you are reaching out to God/Jesus. There seems to be this need. Therefore the reaching out and the blessing. I don't think necessary means that those who have would not also have a need. For me I look at this as needing God needing blessings and needing that relationship with God.

Nathan: Embracing your neediness as a posture before God. Regardless of how much money you have.

Reflections on Luke 12:13-25:

Participant 8: I see a strong admonition to go out and serve. To be a missionary. Without a lot of alternatives.

Participant 9: I need to avoid the positioning of me being God. If I rely on my own skills efforts and abilities. Then I have the same thoughts of the man in Luke 12:13. God humbles you and says it doesn't really matter I can take it away in a snap. When we try and be our own God. That's when we are on the wrong course.

Participant 4: There were 3 words that jumped out at me. Verse 22 – anxious worry fear. He's not saying don't think about these things. Obviously I think God wants us to think about basic things. But I think he's saying don't be anxious about your life; don't worry what you are going to eat. That's an attitude thing. That's an attitude thing. Is this something that has outsize importance to me? Or do I not trust that God will not care for me if I cant care for myself. He's not saying don't think about it don't

be responsible. Just don't worry about it. He's saying don't worry about it I'll be the backstop.

Nathan: Quick poll – raise your hand if you would consider worry about money a relative consistent problem in your heart or mind? Raise your hand. [About one half of the class raises hands]. I raised my hand. I actually have plenty of money, but I worry about it.

Participant 10: I think when we are young we worry. When we grow older we realize how God takes care of us. It's wonderful to keep a journal because you see the things that you were concerned about. *Your father knows that you need them.* God knows what we want and what's on our heart before we even. So when we don't get it we need to be content and know that it was the wrong thing for us any way.

Nathan: contrast before seeking the kingdom vs. seeking something else? What do you think?

Participant 11: I like what the person said about being your own God. I grew up in a wealthy family. I wasn't really a Christian even though it was suppose to be a Christian family. And I really didn't know anything about God. And I put money first. Career, going to college, getting straight A's, my athletic career as my God and myself. It didn't work out. My life went down fast. Now I'm living in Bridgeport and in the kind of area that [Participant 3] said I have such a different view. Now that I have given my life to God. And I have so much more contentment and love in my heart. I see it all being. If I just put God in my first and I go do work and do it unto God and I pray everyday. I pray that whatever I do that I pray to God that I do it and lift him up someway. The other week were doing a garden and the lady said she was selling the house. And one of the guys said oh we will pray for you. And I said no we are praying right now because he started to walk away and we started to pray. If you do everything unto God and we put God first in our lives. You can be rich and put God first it's not a sin to have money. It's where is your heart? Where's the connection? Is God the first thing in your life? Or is it money and oh I need a big house, I need a car. It wasn't Gods kingdom.

Nathan: What I found interesting is – you were talking about the “relationship to work” changed when you sought first the kingdom. Work use to be anxiety inducing for you. Now it seems like it the way you describe it you work in freedom and to for Gods glory. “Unto God’ you are still working hard, but not feverishly or anxiously. But basically in worship. Because you made that one switch. Seeking first his kingdom rather than what work might buy you. That's what I think I heard.

Participant 2: I love the story about the parable. What I glean from it – in vast generalizations. God is an amazing spender. When we covet and gather things up and do not spend, as God would have us spend them. Then we are fools. That's what it says you are fools your life is going to be demanded of you tonight. And yet where is this all going to go? There is kind of meaningless of accumulation for accumulation sake.

But it's also contrary to the character of God. Point to the little birds and everything around. This amazing universe that God lavished on us. And the word lavish is from Ephesians 1:8— I love this word. It defines us how God loves us. *that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure*, God is a lavisher. If we will only take on that characteristic and fall into step with him and his heavenly purposes.

Nathan: Jesus saves, God spends. [laughter]

Participant 3: This scripture and the part of the parable – *this land of the rich man produced plentiful....I will tear down my barns and store all my grains and good*. He has an abundance an overflow. He has so much. And he doesn't think once about giving it to someone with nothing. He keeps it, I have to keep it for myself. Sit back relax and be merry. He doesn't think once about giving it to the person over there who had zip. That stuck out to me. I thought about what Ross said. I love to sing and I think it's obvious to many of you. People have said multiple times to me and say why don't you do something with that singing? Do it to get money...ya know. I don't have a pull in that direction. There's no pull to make money off the gift that God has given to me. I'm worried that if I went in that direction that something in my heart would change. That – me walking in here every Wed night and standing in this beautiful sanctuary the thankfulness that we even get to do it- I don't need anything for it. I don't need money to worship God. It's almost a crazy statement to me.

Nathan: Verse 9 – “I will say to my soul.” We all speak to our own souls. Now I can relax. No actually it's God who says that.

Participant 12: Certain business are valued and given more money. Focusing on the money aspect – not the ability. But if your person say your good at banking, or a doctor. And your full of the spirit – it gives you an opportunity in those places to bring Gods word. Not focusing on the money but the opportunity. And because you get money that's great it's a blessing you can give to other. But it gives you the opportunity that maybe God wouldn't be present. Bank, lawyer's office, doctors office. Only because we put monetary value on it, doesn't mean it wasn't a blessing from God to have you do these things.

Nathan: As a pastor probably two or three times a year I have conversations with people are in the secular work world – *would it be better if I was in ministry?* A better use of my talent. I work through with this with people. Some it's a calling –some it's guilt.

Participant 9: Money itself is not bad. If God lavishes a lot on you. It's really what you do with it. Luke parable – shockingly interesting – what the man does is not intrinsically bad. But he gets judged harsh. Who much is been much is expected. If you are doing it for yourself you are digging your own grave. I think you can give glory to god through money – depends on where your heart is and what you do with the

money. There is warning all long scripture of as soon as you have money it is going to be very difficult to stay pure.

Participant 13: If I had to give this part a title, I would call it stewarding your treasure. I really like how [Jesus] is just so comforting to not fear, be anxious, or worry. That's all throughout scripture: Do not be afraid. He tells us how valued we are above all that he created. We are heirs of the world...But come alongside him and co-create to help steward the things in the world. I watched a baby chick being born this afternoon. He worked so hard and then he laid there. You see God's miracle in action. He's caring for this chick and he got out of this egg. And to think we spend so much time educating ourselves with knowledge to work and do and not that these things are bad – but we make them so complex. And just realize it's so simple. It's right here in this book and he is speaking to us and just follows him and do what he says. Which is the hard part. I think we don't need all the knowledge the Holy Spirit is right there telling us what we need to know. This is a more complex life the more we have – because it's more we need to steward. But I do feel he has equipped us for that challenge. But letting our hearts go of those things and fill them with him. And he will show us how to steward those things with him.

Reflections on Matthew 19:16-26

Participant 12: I think it falls under Being Our Own God. If we think we know everything—we have all the answers—we are never going to get there. Letting go and just accepting Jesus as our Savior and God is it. If you think you have all that knowledge than you get stuck. I don't think the real issue is about money, but maybe your own pride and own knowledge.

Participant 2: Jesus is implicitly with this encounter with this young man who he exactly who he (Jesus) is. It's kind of ironic here – the last 6 of 10 commandments are annunciated by this man. The relationship commandments. Where are the first 4? The God commandments. Jesus is saying here – if you come and follow me you are fulfilling the first 4. He doesn't say what they are – he is what they are.

Participant 9: First reading this you think - If you are rich and you don't give your money away you're not close to God. I think that's the wrong way to look at it. This applies to everyone here reading the 10 commandments. We cannot meet the commandments. The question is – we can get close to it – we can get lost in meeting the demand, which are impossible to meet. But if we focus on god things change.

Nathan: What word does Jesus actually say getting into the kingdom and following his commandments? Impossible.

Participant 5: I see this as a heart thing again. Because Jesus says you have to keep the commandments – the arrogance – which one? Jesus then tells him these and the young man says he's kept them. Oh my gosh lord don't let me be like that. It's excru-

ciating to see someone in that place. But we can go there if the lord allows a situation in our life where he knows we are most vulnerable where we might put something before him. I can't sit here on my high horse and judge this man because the lord knows those areas of weakness and vulnerability where I might be the same.

Reflections on two brief videos shown in class:

Participant 13: As much as the John Piper video was moving – the hardest thing to do is be grateful and thankful when you're dealing with extreme loss like something like that.. And yes, it does glorify God but I just think that absolutely – God forbid that were me – could I do that? Could I say those words as it was happening? I don't know. But that makes sense. The other doesn't. But I believe that truly be being a believer – and loving God in a way that is just extraordinary.

Participant 14: Being totally emptied out – being flattened by situations in life – are the most horrible things that can happen – and yet – if we can reach out and be filled by God where there is nothing - no joy in our circumstances – nothing in safety of where we are. – But totally safety totally life thru him then that is abundance life. Because we are living his life, it's not our life; it's not my life anymore. It's being totally dependent upon him for my entire being. And then I think I will experience what Jesus is talking about it – abundant life that is totally radical. Totally different than anything we ever had or our brain involved in. totally abundant life in him.

Participant 4: The first video – he's not completely wrong – god does want me to be rich – define rich – I went back and looked at Matthew 5. God may not define by a lot of money or a BMW. But how does god define rich or blessed? He wants to hunger and thirst for righteousness. God does want us to be rich – but not in material things – I think that is a lie from the pit of hell – but I think he does want richness for us. It's a definition that has been turned on its head.

Nathan: I think it s true that God doesn't want us to run out of money before we run out of months.

Participant 15: [What stood out to me was] the self-importance and the self-centeredness of the rich young man who came to Christ. It was "I, I, I." And the rich man who stored everything for himself, speaking to his soul, every thing was very much self-centered. I came to think [that] the freedom we need is perhaps the freedom from our own self. And it's not whether we have money or not; that's not the ultimate issue...It's how we spend it—whether we have money or how we spend it—how free we are from ourselves. And only Christ by grace can set us free from ourselves. Being free from our selves means being poor in our spirit—Lord have mercy on us. We are sinners. Acknowledgement of that and realizing that we are human beings with physical needs...that's really hard. We are very needy beings. Our goal is to be only satisfied in God—we also look to him for provision and knowing all that we need.

APPENDIX E

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

125 responses

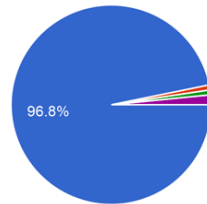
Summary

CONSENT



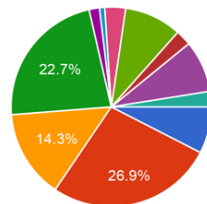
I consent **125** 100%

Religious Identity



Christian	121	96.8%
Jewish	1	0.8%
Muslim	0	0%
Agnostic	1	0.8%
Atheist	2	1.6%
Hindu	0	0%
Buddhist	0	0%
Other	0	0%

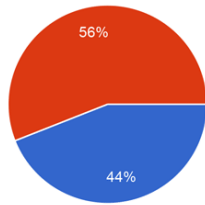
If Christian, which branch or denomination?



Roman Catholic	9	7.6%
Non-Denominational	32	26.9%
Presbyterian	17	14.3%
Congregational	27	22.7%
Lutheran	2	1.7%

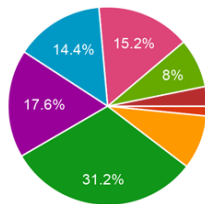
Pentecostal	1	0.8%
Baptist	4	3.4%
Episcopal/Anglican	11	9.2%
Methodist/Wesleyan	3	2.5%
Orthodox (Greek, Russian, etc.)	0	0%
Reformed	10	8.4%
Other	3	2.5%

Gender



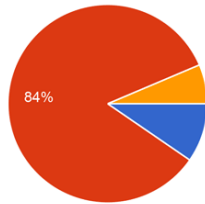
Male	55	44%
Female	70	56%

Age



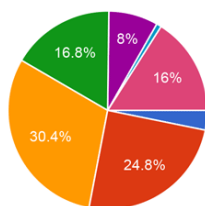
0-15	0	0%
16-21	2	1.6%
22-30	11	8.8%
31-40	39	31.2%
41-50	22	17.6%
51-60	18	14.4%
61-70	19	15.2%
71-80	10	8%
81 or older	4	3.2%

Relationship Status



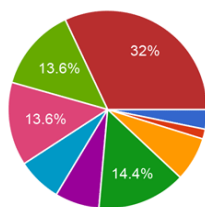
Single	12	9.6%
Married	105	84%
Other / In a Non-Marriage Relationship	8	6.4%

Household Income



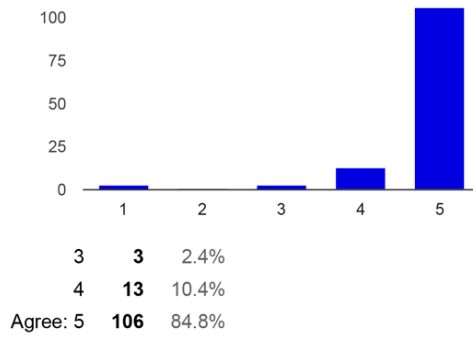
\$0 to \$18,550	4	3.2%
\$18,550 to \$75,300	31	24.8%
\$75,300 to \$151,900	38	30.4%
\$151,900 to \$231,450	21	16.8%
\$231,450 to \$413,350	10	8%
\$413,350 to \$466,950	1	0.8%
\$466,950+	20	16%

Net Worth (All personal assets minus all personal debts)

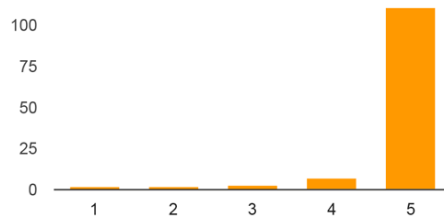


-\$100,000 or more	4	3.2%
-\$50,000 or more	2	1.6%
\$0 (My assets minus my debts equal around \$0)	9	7.2%
\$1-\$50,000	18	14.4%
\$51,000-\$100,000	9	7.2%
\$101,000-\$200,000	9	7.2%
\$201,000-\$500,000	17	13.6%
\$501,000-\$1million	17	13.6%
More than \$1million	40	32%

There is at least one person in my life who loves me unconditionally.

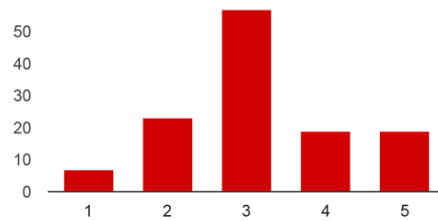


I believe that God loves me unconditionally.



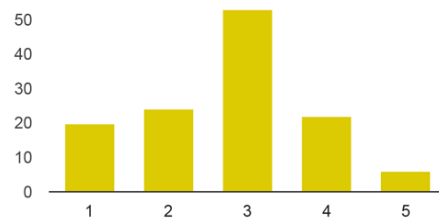
Disagree: 1	2	1.6%
2	2	1.6%
3	3	2.4%
4	7	5.6%
Agree: 5	111	88.8%

Most of my friends are wealthier than I am



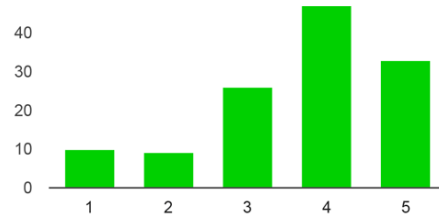
Disagree: 1	7	5.6%
2	23	18.4%
3	57	45.6%
4	19	15.2%
Agree: 5	19	15.2%

I am wealthier than most of my friends



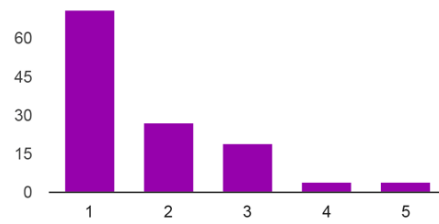
Disagree: 1	20	16%
2	24	19.2%
3	53	42.4%
4	22	17.6%
Agree: 5	6	4.8%

I consider myself relatively wealthy



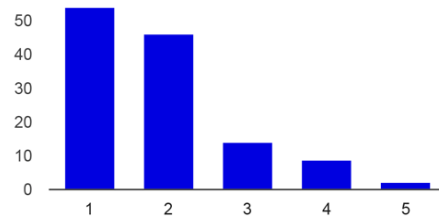
Disagree: 1	10	8%
2	9	7.2%
3	26	20.8%
4	47	37.6%
Agree: 5	33	26.4%

I consider myself relatively poor



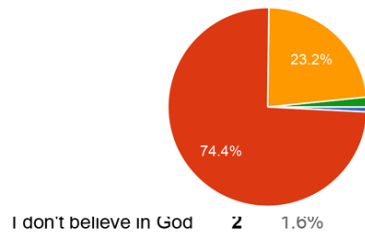
Disagree: 1 **71** 56.8%
 2 **27** 21.6%
 3 **19** 15.2%
 4 **4** 3.2%
 Agree: 5 **4** 3.2%

Most people who are poorer than I am could have as much money as I have if they worked as hard as I do.

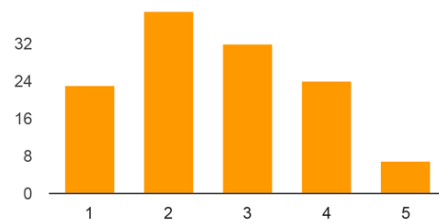


Disagree: 1 **54** 43.2%
 2 **46** 36.8%
 3 **14** 11.2%
 4 **9** 7.2%
 Agree: 5 **2** 1.6%

I believe that God wants me to have less money than I currently have.

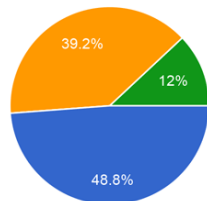


Generally speaking, people who are wealthier than I am tend to be more arrogant than me.



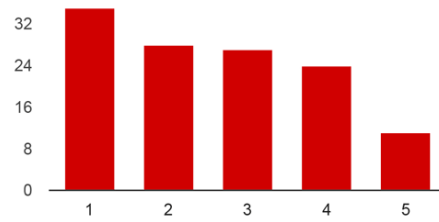
Disagree: 1	23	18.4%
2	39	31.2%
3	32	25.6%
4	24	19.2%
Agree: 5	7	5.6%

When a friend of mine gets a large bonus or sudden increase in wealth, I feel



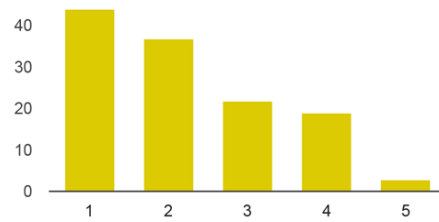
Truly happy for the person	61	48.8%
Jealous of the person	0	0%
Both happy and jealous	49	39.2%
Neither happy nor jealous	15	12%

I find myself daydreaming about having more money.



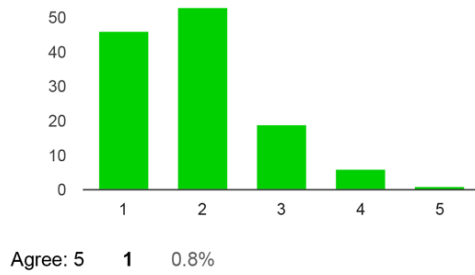
Disagree: 1 **35** 28%
 2 **28** 22.4%
 3 **27** 21.6%
 4 **24** 19.2%
Agree: 5 **11** 8.8%

When I hear most ministers talk about money, I tend to get nervous.

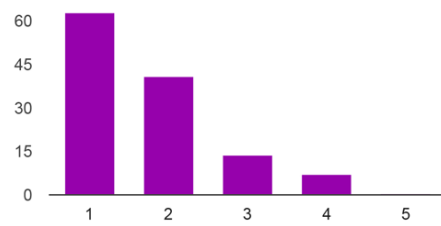


Disagree: 1 **44** 35.2%
 2 **37** 29.6%
 3 **22** 17.6%
 4 **19** 15.2%
Agree: 5 **3** 2.4%

Most people who are wealthier than I am don't work as hard as I do.

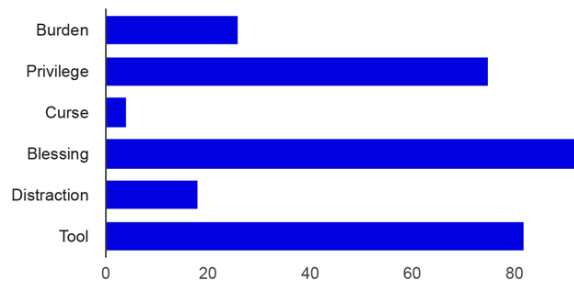


I have been surprised when I've met a poor person who seems truly happy.



Disagree: 1 **63** 50.4%
 2 **41** 32.8%
 3 **14** 11.2%
 4 **7** 5.6%
Agree: 5 **0** 0%

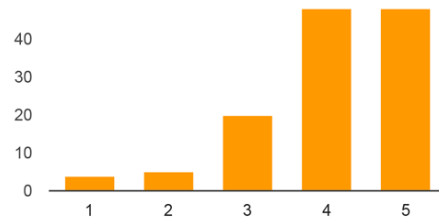
I view my money as a



Burden **26** 20.8%

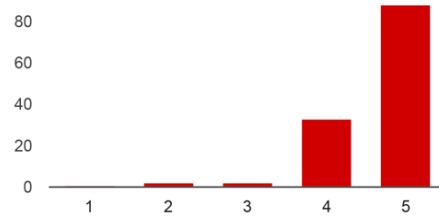
Privilege	75	60%
Curse	4	3.2%
Blessing	93	74.4%
Distraction	18	14.4%
Tool	82	65.6%

There is nothing on earth I desire more than God.



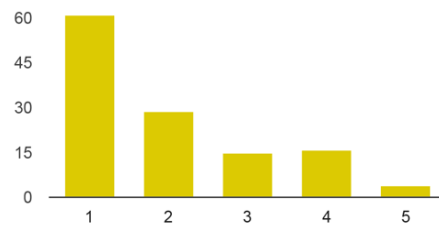
Disagree: 1	4	3.2%
2	5	4%
3	20	16%
4	48	38.4%
Agree: 5	48	38.4%

Aside from my money or possessions, I feel rich in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally



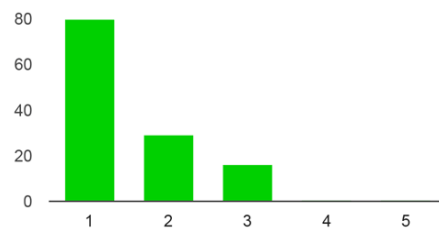
Disagree: 1	0	0%
2	2	1.6%
3	2	1.6%
4	33	26.4%
Agree: 5	88	70.4%

Aside from my money or possessions, I feel poor in other ways, such as spiritually or relationally



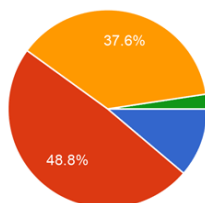
Disagree: 1	61	48.8%
2	29	23.2%
3	15	12%
4	16	12.8%
Agree: 5	4	3.2%

When people look at me, they probably think, "There is a poor person."



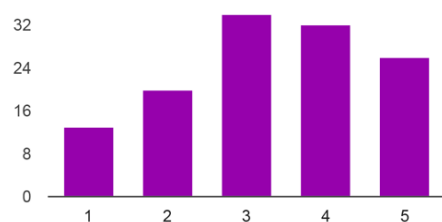
Disagree: 1	80	64%
2	29	23.2%
3	16	12.8%
4	0	0%
Agree: 5	0	0%

I believe that God wants me to have more money than I currently have.



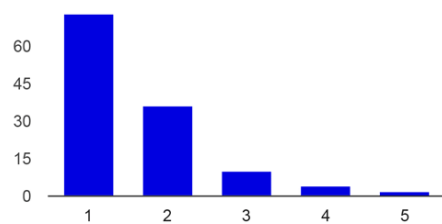
I don't believe in God **3** 2.4%

I feel guilty when I don't give money to the poor.



Disagree: 1 **13** 10.4%
 2 **20** 16%
 3 **34** 27.2%
 4 **32** 25.6%
 Agree: 5 **26** 20.8%

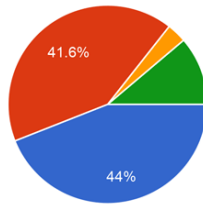
I have been surprised when I've met a rich person who seems miserable.



Disagree: 1 **73** 58.4%
 2 **36** 28.8%
 3 **10** 8%
 4 **4** 3.2%

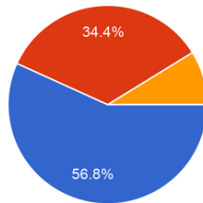
Agree: 5 2 1.6%

Tithing



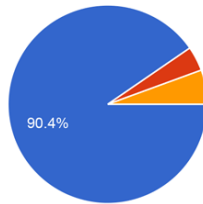
I tithe 10% or more to my local house of worship	55	44%
I tithe less than 10% of my income to my local house of worship	52	41.6%
I belong to a local house of worship but I rarely give any money to it	4	3.2%
I don't belong to a local house of worship.	14	11.2%

I feel like I've earned my wealth by working hard for it.



True	71	56.8%
False	43	34.4%
I don't have any wealth	11	8.8%

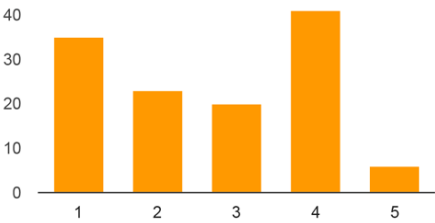
I feel lucky or fortunate to have the amount of money that I have.



True	113	90.4%
False	5	4%

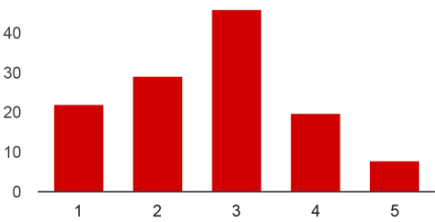
I don't have enough money to feel lucky or fortunate about it **7** 5.6%

Sometimes I feel jealous of people who are wealthier than me.



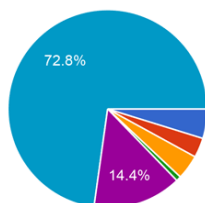
Disagree: 1 **35** 28%
 2 **23** 18.4%
 3 **20** 16%
 4 **41** 32.8%
Agree: 5 **6** 4.8%

When people look at me, they probably think, "There is a rich person."



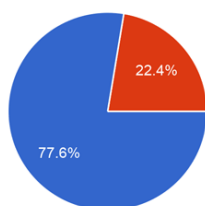
Disagree: 1 **22** 17.6%
 2 **29** 23.2%
 3 **46** 36.8%
 4 **20** 16%
Agree: 5 **8** 6.4%

I attend a Christian worship service



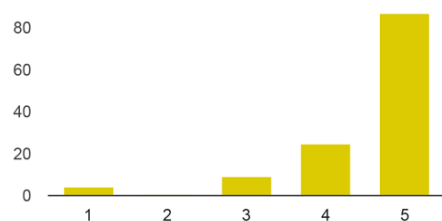
1-3 times per year	4	3.2%
4-10 times per year	5	4%
About once a month	1	0.8%
About twice a month	18	14.4%
Every week or more	91	72.8%

I attended a worship service within the last seven days.



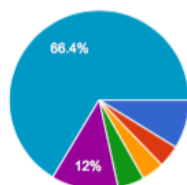
True	97	77.6%
False	28	22.4%

I sense that God is with me wherever I go.



Disagree: 1	4	3.2%
2	0	0%
3	9	7.2%
4	25	20%
Agree: 5	87	69.6%

I personally read or study the Bible



Rarely	11	8.8%
1-3 times per year	5	4%
4-10 times per year	5	4%
About once a month	6	4.8%
About twice a month	15	12%
Every week or more	83	66.4%

APPENDIX F

SERMON TRANSCRIPT: “WHO NEEDS JESUS?”

The following sermon, “Who Needs Jesus?” was preached at Stanwich Congregational Church in Greenwich, CT, on Sunday, September 11, 2016. The sermon audio, taken from the 10:45 AM worship service, was transcribed on Thursday, September 15, 2016.¹

Who Needs Jesus?

When I was nine years old I was being brought up in Holland, Michigan. And I remember one day very specifically. My dad and I drove down a couple of hours to go to the big city. The big city being Chicago. We drove into Chicago for the explicit purpose of going to the observation deck of what was then called the Sears Tower. I remember the day vividly. There was a bright blue sky and lots of sunshine. We could see Lake Michigan for miles. But there was something else I saw that day that left a deeper impression on my little nine year old soul. I saw something that day that wasn't at the heights of the tower but was down on street level, on the sidewalks of the big city. I was walking through those sidewalks with all the sea of humanity going by, walking with my dad. And I remember holding my dad's hand as we walked. And we were walking down the sidewalk and we came up towards an intersection and there on the corner of a tall building standing on the sidewalk was an old man who really captured my attention. I remember him like I saw him yesterday. He was an older man with grey hair. He was wearing old raggedy clothes. In one of his hands he held a cane. In the other hand he held a tin cup. And I could hear a little bit of loose change in the tin cup and he shook it a little bit as we walked by. And as we walked up closer to him I began looking at his face. I noticed that though it was a clear sunny day his eyes were closed. In fact, his eyelids were sunken in a little bit. I realized that this was a blind man. And we got closer to him and I was captivated by the image of him. As we walked by him I kept taking him in. We got about halfway across the street before my emotions took over me. And I pulled on my dad's hand and I said, “Dad, we just walked right by that man. He needs our help.” And my dad said, “Which man?” And I pointed to him. Then I remember my dad leaning towards me saying, “Of course, you're right. Let's go.” And we walked back towards the man. I

¹ For video and audio of this sermon, visit <http://nathanhart.org/rivulets/who-needs-jesus/>

remember my dad pulling out his wallet and pulling out some dollar bills, handing them to me, and I took them. I placed them in the tin cup. The whole experience was overwhelming for me. But then what happened next was a big surprise. It's probably one of the reasons I remember it so vividly. As soon as the man felt the money go into his tin cup, he immediately responded by saying, "Hey thanks, you want a pen?" And he produced this box of like twenty pens. They were Bic pens. They were all the same. He handed me one as a thank you gesture. So I took it and we were walking away and I looked at the pen. And it had some words on it. It had the name of the man's church with an invitation to come worship there this coming Sunday. My mind was blown! As I had walked up to the man my heart was exploding with compassion. As I walked away from the man my mind was exploding because my categories were breaking. My categories of 'who needs who' in this situation. I thought he needed my material provision. He thought I needed the Lord. I needed to come to his church and meet Jesus. Who needs a savior here in this situation? Who needs Jesus?

That's the question we're going to be asking all fall in our sermons here. Who needs Jesus anyway? We're going to be journeying through the Gospel of Luke asking that question. Luke does a great job of breaking up our categories of who we think needs Jesus. It's pretty easy for us to say, "That guy over there. He needs Jesus." Or, "This category of people. They need Jesus." It's harder to ask the question and answer it by saying, "I do. I need Jesus. I'm in need."

We meet two people in today's reading that really help us begin to ask this question and break apart our categories. Did you see them in your mind's eye like I did as we read the text? There they are, the rich ruler and the blind beggar. If you look on the page of your pew bible, you see that we have two columns right next to each other on the page and these two men are presented side by side on the one page. On the one column you have the rich ruler. On the other column right next to him you have the blind beggar. I wish we could bring them both into the room right now just so we can behold them. Can you picture the rich ruler? The text says he's extremely rich. When we hear the word "Ruler" we think in our contemporary context it's a ruler of a kingdom or a ruler of a corporation or something. But if you read the commentaries on this he's probably the ruler of a synagogue. He's a religious ruler. So this man has material wealth. He also probably considers himself quite righteous. He seems to enjoy the reputation of being righteous. We might say about this man, he has it all. He has it all together. If Facebook was invented in his time you could go to his Facebook wall and see a picture of him with his beautiful children. In front of their very expensive vacation home, holding their own personal bibles. He has riches and he has righteousness. You see him? On the other side of your page you have a man who is, in some ways of measuring things, in the exact opposite category. He has no riches. He's a blind beggar sitting on the side of the road in the hustle and bustle of a busy city. He's probably covered in the dust and dirt of all those people walking by. He's on the margins of society. This is in a time before there's Medicaid or social safety nets. So his only option in life was to sit there or stand there by the side of the road, his palms open, begging for provision from the people walking by. Two very different men who both encounter Jesus, maybe even on the same day. We can learn a lot from them and the posture of their hearts even when we look at how they greeted Jesus. The rich ruler, he sees that Jesus is right in front of him and what does he say?

How does he greet Jesus? He says, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Good teacher... Do you know anybody who thinks of Jesus merely as a good teacher? Oh that Jesus, he taught some really great things: Love your enemy, turn your other cheek, do unto others. He's a great teacher. Risen from the dead? Son of God? These are harder things for me to accept but he was a good teacher. You see what happens when we do that? When we think of Jesus merely as a good teacher. We devalue his position. We raise our own. In fact that's what the man is doing here. He's putting Jesus in the position of "good teacher" and he raises himself because he says to Jesus, "What must *I* do to inherit eternal life?" The man thinks it's all about him. He thinks he's capable. He's elevated himself to the place of thinking he's capable of doing something to inherit eternal life. This is an absurd question. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Does anyone here have blue eyes? What did you do to inherit blue eyes? *Nothing*. You just received them. This man looks at Jesus, the Son of God, and says, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It's an absurd question. He thinks it's all about *him*. On the other hand on the other side of your page is the blind beggar, he greets Jesus differently. What does he say? He hears a commotion going by and he says, "What's going on?" And people say, "Jesus is walking by." The man cries out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Son of David. That's not a phrase we often use but in ancient Israel that was a loaded phrase. Son of David. Everybody knew who David was. He was the anointed King of Israel, the one who sat upon the throne of the nation. But people longed for, they anticipated, they looked forward to the Son of David, the Heir of David. The one who would come and not just sit upon the throne of the nation but the one who would come and rule all nations. God's chosen Messiah. Just in his greeting, the blind beggar calls out to Jesus, recognizing him for who he was. Though he was physically blind he saw through the eyes of faith who Jesus was. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! Whereas the rich ruler said, "What must *I* do to inherit eternal life" the blind beggar said, "Have mercy on me." You see, the rich ruler had brought Jesus low and elevated himself but the blind beggar recognized Jesus as the one who would be the king on the throne of the nations. He viewed himself as one in need of mercy from the king. We learn all this just in the greeting.

How does Jesus respond to these two different men? What does he say in response to them? To the blind beggar he fights through the crowd and he walks up to him and he says, "What do you want me to do for you?" In other words, "You have a need? I have resources. Just name it and it's yours." Jesus, the one with all the resources of all the nations. Remember he is the king on the throne of all the nations. The one with all the resources of the whole universe at his disposal, walks up the blind beggar and he says, "What do you need? Name it. It's yours." Would you like Jesus to say that to you? What does he say to the rich ruler? Verse 22: "One thing you still lack" in other words, "Something's missing here. I see your list of accomplishments. Congratulations. But I see something missing." How would you like Jesus to say that to you?

Why does Jesus say, "One thing you still lack."? The man had come with a boasting of all that he had gained, all that he had done in his life, Jesus says, "I'm interested in the thing that's lacking, the thing that's missing." We can learn why Jesus

said that by looking at the preceding dialogue. Remember the man had said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Then Jesus names five of the Ten Commandments. He names the social ones, the visible ones: Do not commit adultery, do not lie, do not steal, or murder. Honor your father and mother. He names five of the Ten Commandments and the man stands there and looks at Jesus and he says “Yup. Done.” All these I’ve kept from my youth. If there are boxes to check, I’ve checked them all. Done.” Jesus says, “One thing you still lack.”

Now I have a question for you, congregation. This is not a trick question. How many commandments are there in the Ten Commandments? Come on! Good job! You know more than this man did. Because he proudly states, “I’ve done all these from my youth.” Well only five of the Ten Commandments were stated. One thing you still lack, something’s missing. Now if we are reading the bible carefully we have to ask, which five are still missing? Which ones couldn’t the man boastfully say he was keeping? Read the Ten Commandments, it’s right there in your Old Testament in Exodus. There are ten listed, the man proudly says he can do five. The missing ones are the first four and the tenth. The first four and the tenth. The first four have to do with worshipping God: You shall have no other Gods before me, do not make for yourself a graven image, do not take the Lord’s name in vain and remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. If you’re following those four laws you are worshipping God. You are seeing him for who he truly is, the king upon the throne of your life. The man couldn’t say he was doing those things. It was all about him and his social obedience to the social laws. He also misses the Tenth Commandment. You know what the Tenth Commandment is? You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. I find this very interesting. Here’s a rich man, a wealthy man, and as the text seems to imply, he’s not truly worshipping God. He might also be coveting what his neighbor has. This makes sense if you think about it. Because in this man’s mind it’s all about him. It’s all about what he’s done to earn blessings from God. All about his accomplishments and what that will make God give him. And if you’re living that way, if you’re thinking, “My obedience, my goodness, is what God’s going to reward with blessings.” Then suddenly if you see your neighbor having something nice, you think, “What did he do to deserve that?” And you might have covetousness in your heart. I think that’s what’s probably going on in this man’s life. He wasn’t truly worshipping God and he may have been coveting what his neighbor’s had.

Now what’s the outcome of these two encounters with Jesus? What happens in their stories? Famously, the rich man after encountering Jesus goes home sad. He walks away disappointed and sad. But the blind beggar has a different outcome of his story. I want you to read this with me. This is pretty amazing. This is verse 43. What’s the outcome of the story? The encounter between Jesus and the blind beggar. Here’s what it says in verse 43, “Immediately he recovered his sight and he followed Jesus glorifying God and all the people when they saw it, gave praise to God.” That’s a pretty good outcome. He got healed, he followed Jesus, he glorified God, and he inspired other people to praise God.

I would love for this to be my personal mission statement. I want to experience God’s healing power, I want to follow Jesus, I want to bring glory to God, and I want to inspire a few other people to bring glory to God. Wouldn’t you love for that to be said about you? Nancy and I, we looked at this text this past Wednesday. And

we looked at it in light of raising our children. And we agreed, we would love for this to be true about our children as they enter into adulthood. When my boy is 18, ten years from now, when Riley is entering into college, I'd love for somebody to pull me aside and say, "I like hanging around your son Riley. He follows Jesus. He brings glory to God. And he inspires others to do the same." I'd love the same to be said about little Eva as she grows up. Now let's think about this for a second. Nancy and I as parents sat down, we looked at the story and we agreed we hope our kids lives turn out just like the blind beggar. See the wisdom of God? It's different. It's upside down from human wisdom. If I were to go to Greenwich Avenue with a microphone and I were to say, "Hey you're raising children. Would you like them to be rich rulers or blind beggars?" What are people going to say? Rich rulers. The wisdom of man doesn't necessarily lead us to the same place as the wisdom of God. My hope, our prayer for our children is that no matter how materially wealthy or poor they become; I hope to be able to say about them what was true about the blind beggar. That they get healed by him, that they follow Jesus, that they glorify God, that they inspire others to do the same. I don't want them driving home from church after meeting Jesus, sad.

I want to offer you three principles from the text. Three principles that we can draw from the story. Here's the first one: You can be materially poor but rich in faith. You can be materially poor but rich in faith like the blind beggar. He was obviously materially poor. But do you see the richness of his faith? Verse 38, he cries out "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." As far as I can tell in the whole rest of the gospels there are only two other kinds of beings who recognize Jesus from minute one for who he really was: Angels and demons. And there's this man, this human, though he's blind physically, has clear eyed vision in the eyes of faith. And he says, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." He is rich in faith! Though he is materially poor. And Jesus responds to him by blessing him with healing and with even more faith.

Principle number two: This one's a little bit harder for us to hear. You can be materially rich, but have a spiritual blind spot. You can even be self-righteous but have a big spiritual blind spot. I ask you when you consider these two men, which one was really blind? You see the blind beggar, started the story blind and marginalized by society. But he ends the story with his eyes clear both physically and spiritually. And Jesus has brought him from the margins right into the family. Whereas the rich ruler begins the story probably considering himself right at the center. He's not marginalized. He's right at the center of where society would value things. But at the end of the story he has marginalized himself. He walks away from Jesus sad. Why? Because Jesus exposed his blind spot. If you're self-righteous it's all about you. You probably have a huge blind spot. I loved the opening hymn we sang this morning. Especially that line where it pictured us all going up to the throne of Jesus, the throne of the universe. Did you hear that line? "Cast your trophies at its feet and crown in lord of all." Oh you're the rich ruler? Nice trophy. When you get before the throne of God, throw it down and crown him lord of all. You got dad of the year? Congratulations. You sold your company for 100 million dollars? Awesome, nice trophy. Whatever it is bring it to the throne of Christ, the throne of the universe. We're going to just cast it down all together and crown *him* lord of all. We won't have a blind spot if we do that.

Our only blind spot is if we think it's all about us, we can accomplish it, we can do it, we can become our own saviors. It's a blind spot.

Now that leads to the third principle, the last one: If you want to be saved, you can't rely on yourself. You need a savior. You thought I skipped over the really hard verses. You thought we were just going to end the sermon without me dealing with the camel and the eye of the camel. Oh no. We're going to look at that right now because the principle is true. In order for the salvation you can't rely on yourself, you need a savior. That's what Jesus was trying to convey after the exchange with the man where he says, "One thing you still lack, go sell all of your possessions, distribute them to the poor, and follow me." Then Jesus says, it's really hard for a person with wealth to enter the kingdom of God. In fact it's harder to do that than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. I've read lots and lots of commentaries on this phrase. I've heard lots of sermons and teachings on this phrase. I've heard teachers and preachers try to nuance this thing. But what I think Jesus is really trying to say – go ahead and picture a camel going through the eye of a needle. To me, that sounds impossible. That's exactly what Jesus is just trying to say to the guy. Remember he had asked, "What must *I* do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says to him, "Do you want to really know what it would take for you to inherit eternal life? You would have to give up everything. You would have to sell all that you have, distribute it to the poor," But he looked inside the man's heart and he knew, it's impossible for you to do that. In fact, the people say, "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus responds, "With man, it's impossible. But with God. But with God. But with God it is possible." And Jesus was describing to the man what he would do for him as his savior. Jesus would be the rich man who gave away all that he had, who left his throne in heaven, and came all the way to planet earth to distribute his grace to the poor. With man it's impossible. You will never earn your salvation; you will never be able to be generous enough to earn your salvation. But Jesus is generous for you as your savior. He is the one that would do it for the man.

Why am I so confident that that's what it was Jesus was really saying here? Because of those four verses that are sandwiched between the rich ruler and the blind beggar. Verses 31 through 34. There they are on your page. They hinge these two stories together. What does it say in those verses? At the beginning of the sermon I wanted you to picture the rich ruler and the blind beggar but here in these verses Jesus wants us to picture him: upon the cross, spit upon, flogged, mistreated, dying, and three days later, rising again. *This* is how Jesus would become our savior. We cannot do it on our own. This is how he would heal us from our spiritual blindness and become our salvation.

So this whole fall as we ask the question, "Who needs Jesus?" we hope that you will see in your mind's eye, Jesus your savior, dying on the cross in your place, rising again over the penalty of death, and answering the question, "Who needs Jesus?" not by saying, "That group of people over there", "That guy" but rather, "I do. I need him to do for me what was impossible for me to do for myself."

Amen.

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